

By Jack Wallen

I recently shared a list of [events I believe were pivotal in shaping today's IT industry](#) – things like the development of COBOL and the creation of UNIX. This time around, I've listed a few of the biggest failures in IT– but I've tried to steer clear of the same ol' items everyone has on their lists.

1 Windows Vista

What a disaster! Could Microsoft have assembled a bigger failure if it tried? Well, possibly. But Microsoft wasn't trying to make a failure – it was trying to make the best of the best. The result was the worst of the best.

2 NeXT

I have to qualify this entry, because NeXT *did* inspire a lot of software for the Linux desktop (such as AfterStep), and the NeXTSTEP did eventually become the foundation of OS X. So NeXT wasn't a complete flop.

3 BeOS

What is it with the capiTallzaTion? Although BeOS has been resurrected as Haiku, the BeOS (and all the cool hardware it promised) never really got the ground. The PC that promised to be the dream machine for the media crowd fizzled out before its fuse could really be lit.

4 Cobalt Qube

The Cobalt Qube looked cool. If you're lucky, you can still find one on eBay going cheap. Underneath that tiny blue exterior lay a beefy 64 MB of RAM and an 8.4 Gig HD that was ready and willing to serve up your Web site, your mail, your DNS, or anything else you needed. Ah, but those were the glory days -- and short-lived at that. The serious IT crowd quickly realized that function held sway over form, and the cool blue Qubes went nowhere. Even after Sun bought the Cobalt company, these devices did nothing.

5 Y2K

I can't resist including this one. The entire world was supposed to cave under the pressure this little bug promised, wasn't it? I even read plenty of sci-fi books based on that premise. But nothing happened. Banks didn't lose all of your money, the world's security didn't fall to pieces, and all IT professionals woke up the next morning collectively saying, "Was that it?"

6 MP3

I know, I know -- it isn't a flop, exactly, but the MP3 format is on this list because of all the licensing issues it has caused. On the Linux operating system alone, MP3 isn't installed on most distributions, by default, because of licensing issues. As a result, users scramble to get MP3 support built into their various tools. This causes as much hair loss as MP3 causes audio quality loss. There are much better formats out there without the licensing issues, people!

7 Richard Stallman

This man was supposed to be the champion of open source -- but he endangers open source at every turn. Instead of making ridiculous claims, RMS should stand down and let someone with a modicum of tact and sense to take over as the voice of open source software.

8 WordPerfect

What I should actually place here is Corel, the maker of WordPerfect, instead of the software itself. WordPerfect was an outstanding word processing tool. Corel, however, was not outstanding in its ability to market and sell something as good as WordPerfect. So instead of a piece of software that should have single-handedly toppled the Microsoft juggernaut, WordPerfect died. This should never have happened. Any other company could have pulled off this win.

9 IPv6

Should this already be in place? Should something so simple really be that hard? The 'net could run out of IP addresses and there is no solution in place yet. Why? Because we don't have the problem yet. But didn't everyone panic with claims that the "IP sky is falling"? Wouldn't it be smart to go ahead and put this in place? Maybe the powers-that-be are waiting until that very last IPv4 address is issued and we have to say, "We have no more!" At that point, no one will really know how to implement the solution and it will be Y2K all over again.

10 Mesh networks

At one point, wireless was going to cover the entire planet and everyone was going to have free wireless networking, thanks to wireless mesh networks. It didn't happen. It sounded like a great idea, and sites popped up all over the place trying to get users to set up their own mesh networks to further expand the "net." It was a grand idea, based on a grand ideal, but it just never got off the ground. That's a shame, since a "mesh Wifi" would have enabled anyone to be online anywhere. Of course, I am sure the telecoms had NOTHING to do with the fall of mesh networking.

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Version history

Version: 1.0

Published: October 30, 2009