

# CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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## Just Say No . . . to Upgrades

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By Douglas E. Welch

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The endless procession of software upgrades is the bane of any high-tech careerist's life. Worse yet, clients who clamor for the latest, greatest upgrades—without any understanding of the issues involved—make life even more difficult. You only have to witness the uproar over Windows XP or Mac OS X to see the desire that software manufacturers can cause in your clients. In order to preserve your sanity, and your career, there are a few ways to help users say no to software upgrades—at least until any major issues get sorted out by others willing to swim the dangerous waters.

### Just Say No

I'm sure you have faced the typical phone calls and e-mails the morning after a major software announcement. "I want to be upgraded now. Can you install this new software today?" Unfortunately, these calls are usually soon followed by other calls complaining about an update that causes a system to crash, or even worse, destroys data. As any high-tech careerist knows, there are enough problems to face with computer systems without going out and making work for yourself.

A wise computer user once said, "You can always tell the pioneers by the arrows in their backs." I often use this quote when users are clamoring for a new piece of software or hardware. It is always better to let others suffer the slings and arrows of a new piece of software before installing it yourself. You only have to read a Web site like MacInTouch ([www.macintouch.com](http://www.macintouch.com)) to see a clear example of this. After each new upgrade, readers post their experiences with the software. The number of problems listed has often caused me to delay installing software—and forgo the nasty headaches that others have already discovered.

### Do You Need It?

Too often, clients want a software upgrade just because it is new, not because they have any particular issues that would be solved by the upgrade. I call this the *PC Week/MacWeek* syndrome, named after the trade maga-

zines that help high-tech workers stay informed. Once clients see something in a publication, they want to have it, regardless of the issues involved. My requirements for upgrading software are much different.

First, is there a bug or issue in the current software that the new software upgrade explicitly corrects? While an upgrade might cause other problems to arise, if it solves a particularly nasty problem it is probably worth the upgrade. Even then you would want to test the software on one or two machines before rolling it out to everyone in your department or company.

Second, is there a new feature, or combination of features, that can help your clients become more productive? Again, after a few tests you may find that the new features offer a large leap in functionality, and offset any potential issues that might be found.

Finally, if a software upgrade doesn't meet either of these two criteria, I postpone upgrading until the criteria are met, or I am forced to upgrade. This might come from a vendor who announces it will no longer support the software version I am using, or when the older software can no longer access files or services that others create.

This doesn't mean you will have to stay in the technological "Stone Age" forever—just until someone else takes the "arrows" for you. If something is working well, especially in a high-tech environment, it makes little sense to change it unless there is some obvious benefit. A rush to upgrade can often severely damage the productivity of both you and your clients. While it can be fun to ride the cutting edge of technology, too often the "leading edge" turns into the "bleeding edge," when upgrades don't work as planned or cause more problems than they solve. If you find yourself constantly struggling with problems, it might be a reminder to be a bit more cautious before wading into the stormy seas of software upgrades. It might not make you very popular to advise restraint and caution in software upgrades, but, if you are seen, rightly or wrongly, as the chronic cause of technological trouble, your job—and your entire career—could suffer in the long run. □

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