focus on TECH

IBM Lotus Symphony, Kodak printer, Windows 7 in the news

By Art Snyder

The tech agenda looks as promising as ever this winter, with news about an excellent **Office**-compatible software suite named **IBM Lotus Symphony** being available, free! Also, **Kodak** has a fine low-cost multifunction printer that can put a big dent into your customary printing costs. And there's news about the next operating system from **Microsoft**, called **Windows 7**. Read the segments below for all the details.

IBM Lotus Symphony

It's first-rate, free, powerful, polished, useful and easy to use. Descriptives like that are what you'll have in your vocabulary once you've downloaded the **IBM® Lotus® Symphony™** set of productivity tools from the **IBM** Web site. As the company sug-

gests, **Lotus Symphony** is intuitive and *provided at no charge*. Really. There are no catches, either. The company is committed to a broad-based Internet experience, and that means a little less loot going to competitor **Microsoft** for their **Windows** operating system and their **Office** software suite that call for you to upgrade continually and to pay the piper each time.

Lotus Symphony consist of three applications: **Lotus Symphony Documents**, for word-processing; **Lotus Symphony Spreadsheets**; and **Lotus Symphony Presentations**. The document software, of course, is what you'll put to heaviest use, day in and day out, for media releases, school information, session handouts, monthly newsletters, signage and a host of other rink tasks. **Symphony Documents** is a rich, mature program that's as handsome as it is welcoming — if you've used **Word**, **WordPerfect** or any other common word-processing software, you'll find **Symphony Documents** as intuitive and familiar as they say. The program has all the bells and whistles, too, such as

including all the fonts and typefaces you like, utilizing active spell-checking, and offering the ability to access **Word** documents, should you need that feature. With an eye to the future, however, **Symphony Documents** also uses the *open documents format* (ODF) that is emerging as an Internet standard. Should you have any questions regarding **Symphony Documents**, just go to the company Web site and check out the many tutorials and other online help. You also can download clip art and document templates here for use in your newsletters and signage, for example.

With a broadband Internet connection, you can download **IBM Lotus Symphony** in mere minutes and use the programs only moments later. Save yourself some genuine software dollars with a visit the **IBM** site, at symphony.lotus.com.

Update: Microsoft OneCare

Admirably, **Microsoft** in the past two years committed its resources toward the development of an antivirus business, along with a bundled suite of PC utilities. The result was **Windows Live OneCare**. I've used the software for a year (I've used and do use several other programs on other PCs, to test them), and it has done a superb job. Now, the puzzling news: **Microsoft** has decided to squelch the whole test effort and dispense with **Windows Live OneCare**. The software end comes in June, and **Microsoft** instead will offer **Windows** users free antivirus and security software, which they have named **Morro**. So, testing of that will begin anew, in time.

"In order for us to focus on delivering this new security solution to millions of customers around the world, we have decided to phase out **Windows Live OneCare**," a company techie wrote in a blog posting in November. This is likely corporate-speak for "We didn't meet our sales goal."

Replacement **Morro** is expected by the third quarter of 2009, and the company will let **OneCare** die on the vine. Early indications are that **Morro** will offer fewer features than **OneCare**; antivirus features will be included, but disk utilities will be absent. It's too early to say what effect this **Microsoft** change in direction will have for consumers, but you can look to this column for the latest inside scoop.

Kodak ESP 5 All-in-One Printer

Known for generations for their cameras, **Kodak** today has its sights on the larger imaging picture: all-in-one

Kodak ESP 5 All-in-One printer.

(multifunction) color inkjet printers. To this end, the company has introduced the **Kodak ESP 5 All-in-One Printer**. At about $150, this sleek printer outputs glossy photo-quality pictures, from borderless 4- by-6 inches on up; standard documents, as you probably craft every day, at a brisk 30 pages per minute (ppm) in black ink, to 29 ppm for color; and documents of any common size, which the printer's automatic sensor detects and chooses the optimum settings, for superior results all the time.

A major draw with the **Kodak ESP 5** is its bargain-basement cost for replacement ink cartridges. A black cartridge, for example, lists at $9.99, and the five-ink replacement cartridge is only $14.99. Buy both as a two-unit deal for $24.98. Competitor replacement cartridges easily can exceed twice that price, and even the off-brand replacements are considerably more than **Kodak's** suggested list price. (A cost-per-sheet analysis underscores the **Kodak** printer's cost advantage.) Yes, you can scan and copy with the **Kodak ESP 5**, as with other multifunction brands, and the wireless option allows for less clutter in your rink back room. **Kodak** includes a one-year warranty on the **Kodak ESP 5**, its printheads

and the non-empty print cartridges. The **Kodak ESP 5** is compact, for sparing desk space; it measures slightly less than 17 inches wide, 12 inches deep and 7 inches high. For light everyday usage, the **Kodak ESP 5 All-in-One Printer** performs reliably, with superior operational costs and a very competitive unit cost.

Windows 7 on the horizon

The **Microsoft Windows XP** operating system has been out for more

than five years, and in that time, it's continued to improve via **Microsoft's** incremental updates and the honing and tweaking of its features. It now rates as the most stable of **Microsoft's** several **Windows** platforms. For that reason and regardless of **Microsoft's** threats, the company has yet to fully pull the plug on the system, despite the fact that its replacement — **Windows Vista** — was introduced more than a year ago. **Vista** is a pretty good operating system, although software compatibility issues remain on the agenda. The story remains complex.

Microsoft has publicly announced several dates for the targeted time to force users off **XP** and onto the **Vista** upgrade bandwagon. Each time, however, they've backtracked in the face of a chorus of "No!" votes, and the **XP** operating system continues to breathe. The glitch now? **Windows 7** is the next operating system due up after **Vista**, and **Microsoft** has a targeted release date of less than a year from now. That news doesn't bode well for an unresolved operating system battle that has PC owners resisting the **Vista** upgrade and saving perhaps $150 so they can go directly from **XP** to **Windows 7**, thereby skipping **Vista**. Fur-

ther, it remains unclear if any of the upgrades — from either **XP** or **Vista** — will have systems that are hardy enough for an upgrade to **Windows 7**. So, the questions remain: Upgrade now to **Vista** from **XP**? Then upgrade again to **Windows 7**? Or upgrade to **Vista**, then buy a new PC with **Windows** 7 preloaded and ready to go? Buy a whole new **Vista** PC now and feel certain that its resources will endure an upgrade to **Windows 7**? Or hang on a few months with **XP** and get a new PC with **Windows 7** already loaded? And what about the learning curve, especially if you'd prefer to go from **XP** to **Windows** 7, skipping **Vista** altogether. Decisions, decisions. If you have an older PC, you may not have a lot of options should your PC go kaput. And you may feel too hassled jumping the distance from **XP** to **Windows 7**.

My thoughts? If you have a fair amount of computer experience and confidence, and if you have an **XP** system that runs fine, I'd wait to get a new PC with **Windows 7** loaded and ready for your enthusiasm. You should be comfortable with the increasingly intuitive, though sometimes complex, brain-demands of a new operating system like **Windows 7**. If you have a newer PC with **Vista** or **XP**, you probably should wait until the **Windows 7** is available, then go with that *if* — that's a *big* if — your system resources are adequate; you probably will need a high amount of RAM, in the order of 4 to 8 GB. Some of you may be caught in the middle and will be better off getting a new **Windows 7** PC, although your **XP** or **Vista** PC may be adequate for many of your rink tasks. The future promises features and developments in an operating system that despite your budget or any learning curve, you'll not be able to escape the world of **Windows 7**. I'll be doing some beta testing of the system and will keep you in on developments.

Products mentioned in this column are widely available. Check local office suppliers, computer and technology vendors, mass-merchandise and discount retailers, and mail-order and online sources. With broadband Internet access, software programs are a fast, easy and often cheaper download, saving you staff time and improving efficiency in many ways.

Art Snyder is a longtime RINKSIDER contributor. He lives in Centerville, Ohio, and has used computers and technology since 1986.

Advertiser SPOTLIGHT

Southeastern Skate Supply, with locations in both Roanoke, Va., and Mableton, Ga., introduces its newest skate – the GT-50 Custom Skate.

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Southeastern carries skates and skating supplies from many different vendors as well as a few Southeastern Exclusives (Clawz wheels, Lynx bearings and accessories, Pacesetter wheels, Freespin bearings).

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