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## [XP SP3's Survival Guide in the Linux Den Until Windows 7](#)

### *Analysis*

Microsoft has taken down the Support Lifecycle reference that incorrectly announced the General Availability Date of [Windows XP Service Pack 3](#) for March 31, 2008. In this context, the third and final service pack for XP is still not available for the general public, with Microsoft continuing to play the refrain of an unspecified delivery deadline ahead of mid-2008 down to perfection. Still, with the service pack's imminent arrival, Microsoft is looking at three of its Windows operating systems crowding the market over the next four years - XP SP3, Windows Vista and Windows 7. As long as it's all Windows in the end, it's also a win-win situation for the Redmond company, actually a Win-Win-Win, with the install base continually expanding. But at the same time, Microsoft has been gearing up for the end of availability of XP through the retail and OEM channels. Initially scheduled for the end of January 2008, the XP cut-off date was pushed back until June 30, and the Redmond company is giving out string signals that this is it for XP. Consumers will no longer be able to buy boxed copies of the operating system after June 30, or purchase computers with the platform pre-installed. The small exception designed to confirm the rule is Windows XP Home Edition which will be available for ultra-low-cost PCs until June 30, 2010, or at a maximum of one year after the availability of Windows 7. ULCPCs are a new breed of devices exploding in popularity in both emerging and developed markets, playing different roles from a primary machine for first-time PC customers to a secondary computer. The key to ULCPCs is affordability. In the ULCPCs recipe of computer plus operating system nothing was spared in order to reduce costs, low-powered processors, smaller hard drives and free, open source Linux, the key word being of course free. With the ultra-mobile PCs and ultra-low-cost PCs increasing in audience and popularity, Microsoft cannot afford to miss out, and just give up the new territory to Linux. **Microsoft Says It's All Windows, All the Time** But not Windows Vista. Not for ULCPCs, first because of the price tag, and secondly because of the system requirements. Even Windows Vista Starter Edition, the SKU of the operating system aimed specifically at emerging markets requires at least a 800 megahertz (MHz) processor and 384 MB RAM and at least 15 GB of free space on the hard disk. With some ULCPCs coming with just 256 MB RAM and a hard disk that is 4 GB or smaller, Vista, even with its most basic edition, is not a choice by any standards. Even XP has problems integrating with such hardware infrastructures. "One thing we've heard loud and clear, from both our customers and our partners, is the desire for Windows on this new class of devices. We are enthusiastic about this category because it enables us to bring the benefits of Windows to more customers," revealed Michael Dix, General Manager of Windows Client Product Management. "Three benefits are driving this interest in Windows. First, the Windows experience makes it easy for existing PC customers to use these new devices, and it makes these devices easy to learn for customers new to computing. Second, only Windows provides customers access to the widest range of applications, devices and online experiences. Finally, our partners already know how to build and support great systems powered by the Windows platform." Vista is incapable of ending off Linux on ULCPCs, so the task will fall onto [Windows XP SP3](#). Microsoft is of course steering clear of admitting that the move of extending the availability of XP SP3 Home for ULCPCs is a step against Linux. But the fact of the matter is that XP SP3 is the only Windows operating system capable of surviving in the environment of ultra-low-cost PCs which seems perfectly tailored for Linux. And even XP has to be tweaked and adapted to the new devices. Microsoft is, in this regard, hammering away at Vista's predecessor, essentially building an XP survival guide for the Linux den. "We are taking a number of steps to enable our

partners to support this growing class of computers, such as publishing formal design guidelines to the Web to enable manufacturers to build Windows-based flash-based machines with even greater hardware limitations (e.g., under 4GB flash-based storage). We believe these guidelines will enable PC makers to build more reliable, low-cost and easy-to-maintain ULCPCs for customers," Dix added. **The Windows 7 Deadline** June 30, 2010, or one year after the availability of [Windows 7](#), whichever comes first is an interesting deadline for the availability of XP SP3 for ULCPCs. Microsoft plans to continue with the mainstream support of XP until 2009 and then with extended support until 2014. But keeping XP available on the market until 2014 is out of the question for the Redmond company, even though in terms of support users will have no problems. 2010 is the year Windows 7 is scooped for general availability. But this does not necessarily mean that the next iteration of Windows will come with a SKU capable of doing what Vista failed, namely play well with ULCPCs. The fact of the matter is that the technology included in PCs is evolving drastically every two years. This rate will permit ULCPCs to run Windows Vista with no problems in 2010, and Microsoft to put an end to XP's availability. However, Microsoft is not making any bets. "It's too soon to say exactly how this category will evolve during the next few years," Dix said. "As an industry leader, Microsoft is committed to helping our partners accelerate the development of the emerging ultra-low-cost computing category, responding to a strong demand for Windows and opening the door to the benefits of the broad Windows ecosystem internationally. We will continue to partner with industry leaders to help ensure that all ultra low-cost computing devices can leverage the benefits of a quality Windows experience." At the same time, the Redmond company is taking a new strategy when it comes to Windows 7, one that is based on modularization. With MinWin Microsoft is stripping down the Windows core of all possible dependencies, focusing on a bare-boned kernel plus some additional components running in kernel-mode. Reducing the Windows operating system down to its lowest footprint and still creating a standalone version of the operating system are moves that will make Windows 7 fit on a variety of architectures, by adapting it to everything from ultra low-cost machines to high-end computers. **Win, Win, Win** Make no mistake about it, it is all about market share. According to the latest statistics from Net Applications, Windows owns 91.57% of the operating system market, Mac OS X is at 7.48% and Linux at just 0.61%. XP and Vista enjoy the largest install bases with shares of 73.59% and 14.02% respectively. The percentages translate into an estimated one billion people, but there are an additional five billion potential users, and some of them, especially those in emerging markets will have their first contact with an operating system via an ULCPC. Microsoft is simply trying to make sure that it will run Windows. "Today, we've got several billion people out of six billion with a chance to use the over one billion Windows personal computers that are out there, overwhelmingly connected to the Internet, and connecting people up to an unbelievable wealth of information. So we can say that if you were a student 30 years ago trying to pursue a question you were curious about, your opportunity was to go get an encyclopedia, try and look up the information. Today, no matter where you live, if you have access to the Internet, then you have a far better experience. I really envy young people because of this. They can go online and find articles that are completely up-to-date, and see links to other articles, and see links to communities, and find people who are interested in that topic and engage with them on an completely global basis," Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates stated while at the Government Leaders Forum Americas 2008.