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New Version of Windows Operating System Due Sept. 14

Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates talks with Shawntia Humphries, and other Schools for Educational and Evolution Development (SEED) students in Washington on June 6.
(Linda Spillers/AP Photo)

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The Associated Press*

SEATTLE, June 19 — Microsoft Corp. has finished work on the successor to the popular Windows 98 home computer operating system and will officially release the product on Sept. 14.

The new software, called Windows Millennium Edition, was sent to computer makers on today, Microsoft said. It will be included on new computers purchased after the launch date, and consumers will be able to purchase it in stores as well.

A full-install version of the software will cost \$209. People running Windows 98 or Windows 95 who wish to upgrade can purchase the software for \$109.

New Features

The new operating system will include a number of new features, though fewer changes in the underlying technology than in past upgrades. Windows Me, as it is called, will feature a new Microsoft Windows Media Player, which will help customers manage digital video and music on their computers.

Microsoft has also improved Windows' maintenance, making computer error messages easier to understand and creating safeguards against users accidentally deleting critical files.

The new system also includes an upgraded version of the Internet Explorer Web browser, and will feature step-by-step instructions for

linking two or more computers together into a home network.

Low-Key Update

Analysts who watch the company agreed that Windows Me was not as important an upgrade as when Microsoft introduced Windows 95.

“This is very much evolutionary, and even then there’s not too much there,” said Michael Gartenberg, an analyst and partner in the venture capital firm Dellet. “You can download IE and the Media Player off the Internet for free anyway.”

Gartenberg said that some of Windows Me’s appeal will be “psychological” in that computer users will upgrade simply to have the newest and best software. And, analysts noted, there are some perks to the new OS.

“For a hundred bucks, it’s kind of like getting a new computer,” said Rob Enderle, an analyst for the Giga Information Group. “It’s more reliable, it’ll make sure you can use the latest hardware, and you’ll see a performance boost.”

Windows Me will be the last home version of Windows to be built using the 20-year-old Disk Operating System (DOS) technology. The successor to Windows Me, due in 2001, will be based on the more stable Windows 2000 business system, introduced Feb. 17. ■