

# Holiday nightmares

BY STEVE TOBAK

What do high-tech executives want from Santa Claus?

Last night I dreamed I was Santa Claus, which is more than a little odd, since I'm Jewish, thin and not particularly jolly. In the dream, leaders of our industry, candy canes dangling from their mouths, waited in a long line to sit on my lap and tell me what they wanted for the holidays.

First in line to see Santa was Bill Gates. And being the richest man in the country, Bill had a long list. I guess they always want more. First, he wanted his PC to stop crashing so often. Second, he wanted Steve Ballmer to mellow out and stop shouting all the time. Third, and most important, he wished for security updates that actually plugged all the security holes in Windows without creating new ones. Lastly, he wanted all the hackers who create viruses to be locked in a room for a week with Larry Ellison over at Oracle.

And what do you think Larry wanted? He wanted Peoplesoft ... cheap, of course.

Intel's Craig Barrett wasn't quite as greedy with his wishes as Gates. First, he wished for an effective strategy for Intel to break out of the PC world and into the wireless handheld equipment market. His second wish was for Intel to solve its execution issues so it could reclaim the PC processor performance lead from Advanced Micro Devices. He said it was embarrassing to



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have to use that ridiculous processor number system. Finally, he wanted his PC to stop crashing so often.

John Chambers only had one wish: for China to stop copying Cisco's router designs.

Michael Marks of Flextronics surprised me by wishing for better competition; he said his management team was becoming too complacent and that his competitor's negative price-to-earnings ratios were holding back his market valuation. He also wished for the current inventory correction to be really short-lived.

At first, Margaret Whitman of eBay said, "With a market cap of more than \$60 billion and Yahoo closing down PayDirect, its

PayPal-competitor, what more could I ask for?" But, when pressed, a mischievous look came over her face and she said, "OK, what I really want is to burst Google's bubble!"

Having conquered the PC world and put HP/Compaq out to pasture, Michael Dell said he wanted Dell to become the Fry's Electronics of the Internet. He even aspires to put Santa Claus out of business. "Why bother with a fat old man, when it's as easy as Dell?" he said.

Michael also wondered whether I could help convince Gates and Barrett to develop a reference design for a really smart washing machine. Oh ... and he wished for his PC to stop crashing so often.

Scott McNealy of Sun Microsystems really touched me with his whimsical wish: He wanted to wake up on Christmas morning to find the last four years were just a dream. More like a nightmare, if you ask me.

Just as Scott's words began to fade into the ether, I awoke. What a strange dream, I thought. I stumbled into my office to get it all down before I forgot what everyone had wished for. But just as I was finishing up, my computer crashed.

Here's hoping all your holiday wishes come true. ■

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