

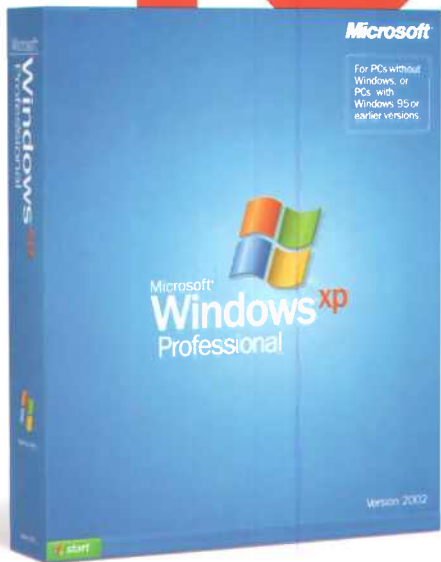
# CRNtech

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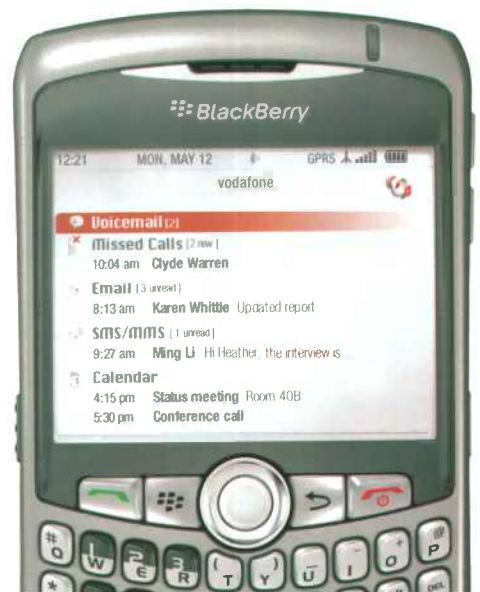
2007

# Products of the Year



It was a whirlwind year of product launches and new technologies. Here's what blew us away.

**SEE PAGE 29**



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## 2007

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# Products of the Year

*Whew! It was a fast and furious ride,  
but here's who truly drove it home*

**W**e're out of breath.

It just never stopped during 2007. From the unveiling of the Apple

Phone to the launch of Microsoft Vista, to the emergence of AMD's barcelona chips into the marketplace, the new products, launches, announcements and solutions just kept coming.

Keeping up to date with the fast-and-furious changes to platforms and functionality meant we never had the chance to slow down.

Even as we wrapped up this Product of the Year 2007 special report, we were kicking the tires of new products, looking under the hood and seeing which had the most horsepower, offered the best mileage per gallon and delivered the most whiz-bang features. When we finally had a chance to look in the rearview mirror at all of the products and technologies that made a difference this year, we found ourselves with a tough task.

It was the year of Microsoft's Vista. It was also the year of Apple's Leopard.

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2007 PRODUCTS OF THE  
YEAR, INCLUDING FULL  
TECHNICAL REVIEWS,  
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Intel's vPro thrashed the rest of the desktop market this year, but Barcelona grabbed its share of attention.

Facebook. Windows Live. VMware. Once again, software became cool and in some cases, potential game-breakers. Picking an application of the year wasn't easy. Nor was it a simple task to choose a favorite notebook.

Desktops themselves got smaller, more powerful and cooler. And they've become even more attractive targets for spammers and hackers, so picking a security product that stood out above all others was a challenge-and-a-half. But the more difficult our job in making these choices, the better it is for the industry and the more value solution providers can deliver to customers.

So what do you think was the Application of the Year? VoIP Product of the Year? We did our level best to sort through it all and present choices that may prompt discussion, debate and disagreement. But let us all agree on one thing: We hope 2008 will keep us just as busy with great technology, products and solutions.

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# Smartphone

**WINNER: RIM BLACKBERRY  
CURVE 8310**

**I**n many ways, 2007 will be remembered as the Year of the iPhone. The device from Apple stole headlines, attention and hearts, winning over more than 1 million buyers in its first three months on the market. Well, that's great for Apple and it's great for consumer gadget fanboys. But for the commercial IT market, it's not enough.

Waterloo, Ontario-based Research In Motion's BlackBerry Curve 8310 is our Smartphone of the Year for several reasons, most important because it's a business device that allows integration with and access to corporate data. It also keeps up the tradition of dependable push e-mail access and throws in GPS functionality, high-quality voice connectivity and one of the smallest form factors RIM has ever produced.

Its 10 to 12 hours of battery life eclipses the iPhone, and its QWERTY keyboard is typically user-friendly—which is what diehard BlackBerry users have come to expect.

Compared to previous BlackBerry versions, the device's multimedia functions rise to a new level. It has a 2-megapixel camera and heightened MP3 play capabilities, 64 Mbytes of flash memory storage capacity along with a microSD slot for external storage. It supports Bluetooth stereo audio and is supported by BlackBerry Enterprise Server. It weighs 3.9 ounces and comes in red or titanium.

Simply put, the Curve 8310 works, plays well with the network and brings BlackBerry functionality to its highest levels yet. If Apple set new standards for consumer functionality with the iPhone, then the BlackBerry continues to set the bar for smartphones in the business world.

—Edward F. Moltzen



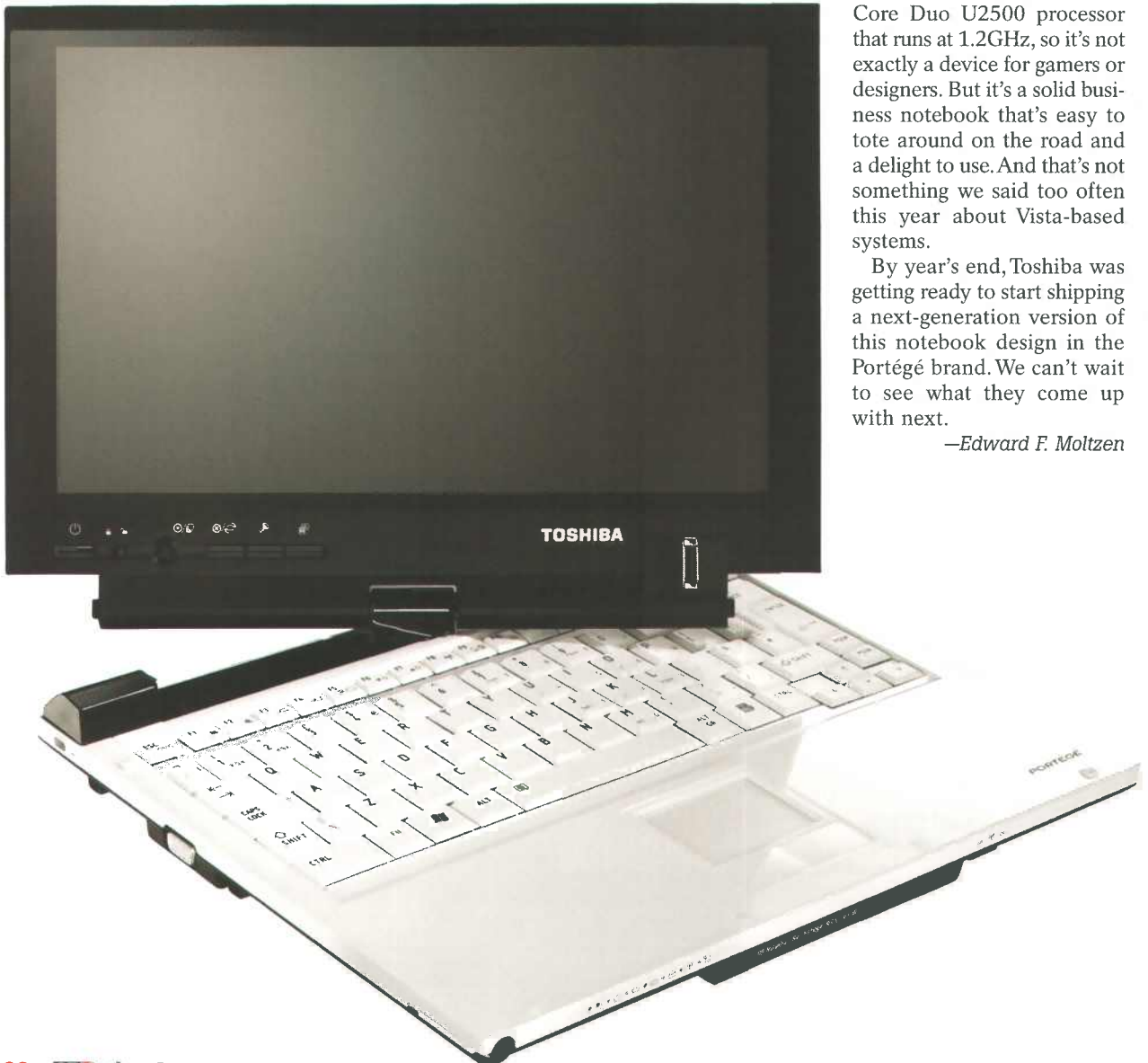
# Notebook

WINNER: **TOSHIBA PORTÉGÉ R400**

**I**t's bright, it's slick and it works like a charm. The Toshiba Portégé R400 got our attention earlier this year and held it, winning our nod for Notebook of the Year. Lightweight and flexible, it's a laptop built to suit the needs of mobile business users.

Its design weighs in at a breezy 3.75 pounds, and measures 14.2 x 10.6 x 1.2 inches. It's covered with an eye-catching glossy white case.

The LCD screen is built so the device can be converted to tablet form via special peg-and-guide hinge pivots and a latch-free lid. The display itself, a 12.1-inch widescreen, maintains native 1,280 x 800 WXGA resolution with LED backlighting for efficiency. And it's easy on the eyes, indoors or out.



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But we're not easily won over on looks alone.

The R400 also sports an integrated fingerprint reader, intuitive volume controls, built-in EVDO Verizon Wireless, 802.11a/b/g Wi-Fi, Gigabit Ethernet and Bluetooth connectivity. It offers push e-mail functionality and a Personal Information Assistant that provides a new e-mail alert without even logging on.

It also gives solution providers opportunities to add layers of service, connectivity and security outside the box.

With the R400, Toshiba America, New York, managed to do what other vendors could not universally do: integrate Microsoft Vista seamlessly into a device with enough hardware to run smoothly, yet still maintain decent battery life (about four hours on standard battery use) and thermals.

The notebook uses an Intel Core Duo U2500 processor that runs at 1.2GHz, so it's not exactly a device for gamers or designers. But it's a solid business notebook that's easy to tote around on the road and a delight to use. And that's not something we said too often this year about Vista-based systems.

By year's end, Toshiba was getting ready to start shipping a next-generation version of this notebook design in the Portégé brand. We can't wait to see what they come up with next.

—Edward F. Moltzen

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## Virtualization

**WINNER: VMWARE INFRASTRUCTURE 3 WITH LAB MANAGER**

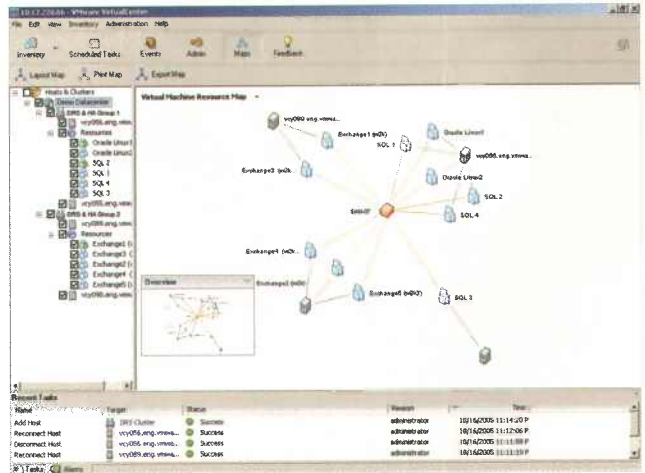
**W**hen you think virtualization, you think VMware. The Palo Alto, Calif.-based spin-off of storage company EMC went public in 2007 with an initial public offering and maintained its leadership position in one of the hottest areas of the IT channel.

It is technologically ahead of its rivals, in part because of the innovative components it offers. That combination was more than enough for the *CRN* Test Center to name VMware Infrastructure 3 with Lab Manager as the Virtualization Product of the Year.

Specifically, we really liked advances VMware has brought to bear in its Lab Manager, a Web tool designed to support developers and testers in highly distributed environments.

Lab Manager provides end-to-end software life-cycle management capabilities that are far and away better than any other offering in the industry. But we found other elements of the VMware Infrastructure 3 suite also compelling, including the ESX Server, its VirtualCenter Management Server and VMware Converter, a nifty tool that allows a solution provider to create virtual machines (VMs) from existing physical machines.

VMware's VMotion live migration technology is capable of transferring VM images on a single SAN, so the migrations are



performed extremely fast. ESX Server can manage clusters of physical hosts that are treated as a single resource pool. With ESX Server installed on several host machines, administrators can treat them as a single pool of CPUs, memory and stored resources, and deploy virtual machines across clusters of hosts.

The bottom line: During a period when the industry is moving toward server and storage consolidation, and when solution providers are being tested on how well they can deliver virtualization services and solutions, VMware Infrastructure 3 provides a channel-friendly, powerful path for VARs and their customers.

—Edward F. Moltzen & Mario Morejon

## VoIP

**WINNER: MICROSOFT OFFICE COMMUNICATIONS SERVER 2007**

**W**ith the introduction of Microsoft's Office Communications Server 2007, the software giant is poised to revolutionize the VoIP space. Its splashy entrance into the lucrative segment early this year had the channel abuzz, waiting to see how Microsoft's wares would impact the market, where it is now squarely pitted against Cisco Systems. Now that it's here, Office Communications Server 2007 is the *CRN* Test Center's choice for VoIP Product of the Year.

With OCS 2007, Microsoft, Redmond, Wash., has delivered a one-stop shop for VoIP, instant messaging, audio conferencing and videoconferencing. It's a unified communications platform that keeps employees connected and helps them collaborate so business decisions can be made quickly. Need to know if a co-worker is available for a phone call or videoconference? OCS 2007 shows you the presence status of other users, a cornerstone of the product's productivity features.

Behind it all lies Active Directory, which is the engine that fuels its deep presence

awareness reach, collecting and storing contact information.

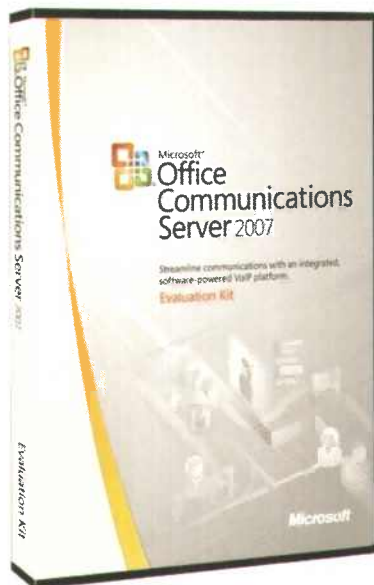
It's capable of acting as a stand-alone IP-PBX, but OCS 2007 also works with many legacy PBX systems to achieve some level of presence awareness. Its unified messaging capabilities tie in with Microsoft Exchange, so users can receive and manage their voice-mail messages via e-mail and interact with other features in Exchange.

OCS 2007 can also interact with Microsoft Office applications, allowing users to exchange detailed information on their whereabouts—whenever users look at e-mails in Outlook they can see the presence information of the senders.

By simply getting presence information from Outlook, users are able to jump right in to voice conversations. OCS 2007 is capable of managing connections with the types of devices and communication paths that users want to make available. What's more, it will make the right connection and reach users based on their active presence properties. Users have a lot of control over their communication by being able to redirect calls on the fly from any location.

VoIP is sure to be a rough-and-tumble space in the year ahead with so many big names slugging it out. We have no doubt solution providers working with Microsoft OCS 2007 will be able to land some pretty big punches.

—Mario Morejon



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# Processor

**WINNER: AMD QUAD-CORE OPTERON**

**W**e'll overlook the fact that Sunnyvale, Calif.-based Advanced Micro Devices announced Barcelona on Sept. 11 but has yet to ship in volume to tier-one manufacturers. We'll overlook the fact that system builders and solution providers have had to put some customers on hold while waiting for the systems to make it into the pipeline. Despite those issues, the *CRN* Test Center awards AMD Product of the Year in Processors for its quad-core Opteron chip because it's a game-changer.

It's blazing fast, but efficient when measured in performance per watt. With servers and workstations based on Barcelona, enterprises can deploy technology that hums down the highway with the power of an SUV but offers the eco-friendliness of a hybrid.

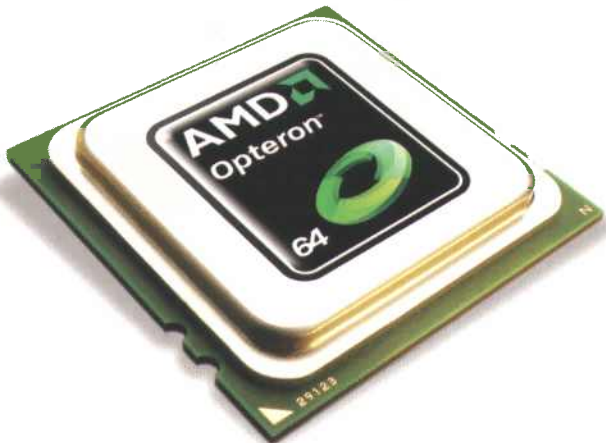
Right before it was announced, Test Center engineers had the chance to run a dual-CPU Barcelona server through a PassMark performance test. It scored higher than any other dual-CPU system we've ever tested.

As they say on late-night infomercials: Wait, there's more. Barcelona is socket-compatible with the dual-core Opterons. Both processors use AMD's Socket F (1207) design. When it comes to heat generation, the thermal load of the quad-core CPU is about the same as the dual-core Opteron. That means the same heatsinks, cooling fans and power supplies can be used as in earlier Opteron systems. AMD engineered Barcelona so that customers can upgrade a dual-core Opteron to a quad-core with a BIOS upgrade and little else.

AMD didn't stop there. The company built in its Cool Core technology, which automatically shuts down parts of a CPU when not in use. And AMD's PowerNow technology makes this not only one of the best-performing pieces of silicon we've ever seen, but also among the smartest.

—Edward F. Moltzen

*Editor's Note: At press time, AMD confirmed that Barcelona shipments would be delayed until first quarter 2008 due to an errata that's being fixed. The errata didn't affect CRN Test Center's earlier testing of the processor, which performed better than any server chip we've ever tested.*



# Desktop

**WINNER: HP COMPAQ DC7800 ULTRA SLIM DESKTOP PC**

**E**lectronics are getting slimmer, sleeker and stylish, so why should desktops miss out on the fun? Just like laptops, tablets and handhelds, it was only a matter of time before desktops joined the movement toward sleek, tiny form factors. PCs used to be a bland lot, a market full of generic rectangular boxes that encroached on valuable legroom under the desk or workspace on top of it. No more.

In 2007, manufacturers proved that the desktop doesn't need to go out for the Boring Award. We were smitten with the design of two in particular: Palo Alto, Calif.-based Hewlett-Packard's Compaq dc7800 Ultra Slim Desktop PC and Lenovo's ThinkCentre A61e, proving good things do indeed come in small packages. Lenovo's principal operations are in Beijing and Raleigh, N.C. In the end, HP won us over with its solid Intel-based performance, ease of deployment and shapely lines, which is why the dc7800 gets our nod for Desktop of the Year.

Injecting new life into a segment many considered moribund, the dc7800 returned solid desktop-worthy results during testing, performing better than many business laptops that have come through our labs.

The computer features an Intel Core 2 Duo processor, 1 Gbyte of memory, an 80-Gbyte hard drive and a PATA LightScribe DVD Writer. It's not built on the newest and shiniest components, but business users don't need the most powerful graphics card or professional-grade sound.

Weighing about 6 pounds, the Ultra Slim Desktop is small enough to be mounted on the back of a 19-inch flat-panel monitor, hung on a wall or attached under a desk.

It's also easy to service, as the majority of common tasks can be done without tools. The case is easy to remove: Turn the thumbscrew and slide the top cover off to see the motherboard. Everything is clearly visible and accessible despite the tight quarters.

If HP's goal was to provide a machine that does enough to meet daily business needs without taking up a lot of space or breaking the bank, then we say mission accomplished.

—Fahmida Y. Rashid

# Operating System

WINNER: **MICROSOFT WINDOWS XP**

**S**ure, there were skeptics at first. But with nearly a full year of product introductions behind us, we can unwaveringly hold up one operating system as our favorite. Yes, it comes from Microsoft, but perhaps it's not the obvious choice. Or, maybe it is.

Microsoft, Redmond, Wash., rolled out Windows Vista, its next-generation desktop operating system, early in 2007. But for many solution providers and their customers—at least the ones brave enough to try it—deploying Vista felt like swimming in cement. Driver support was off. Upgrade paths were off. The performance and security boosts just weren't there. By midyear, it became clear that it was still no match for what we're now calling OI' Reliable: our Operating System of the Year for 2007, Windows XP.

Not only are most tier-one PC manufacturers still offering XP as an option, most have continued to make it their “wink-nod” recommendation for business PCs. Some solution providers have gone further: By and large, many have come to view the XP

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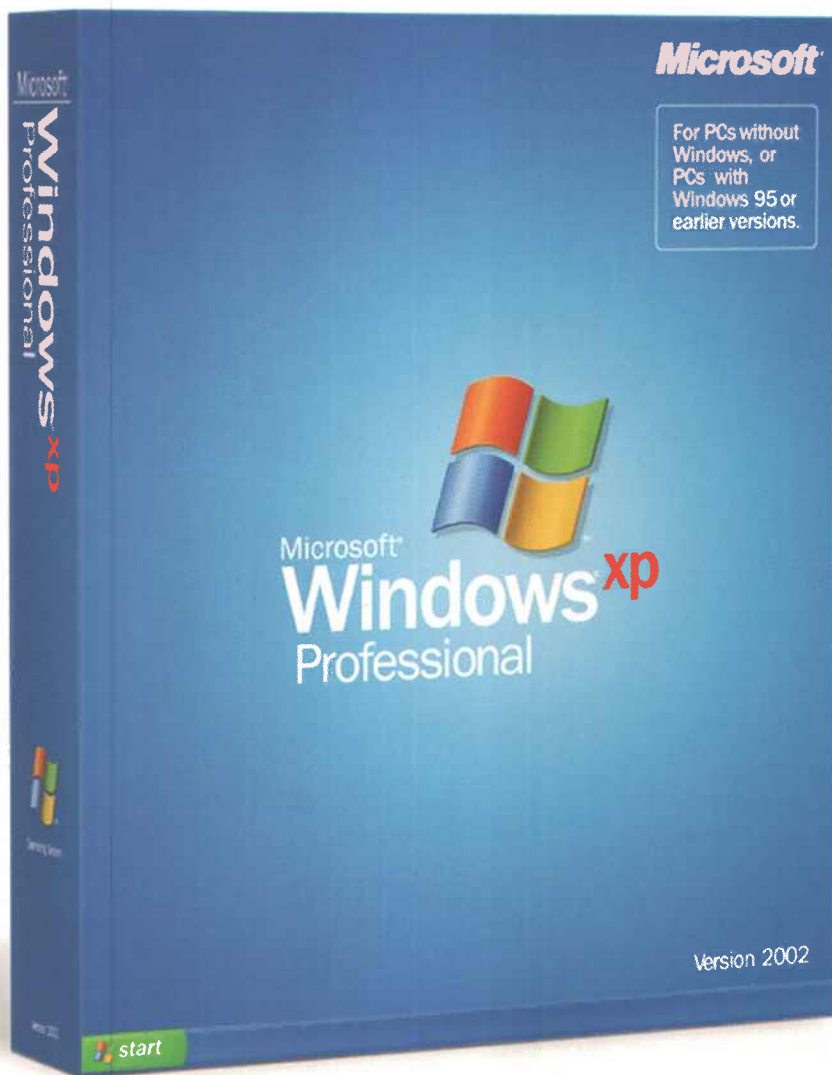
*downgrade* path as the most cost-effective and reliable for their customers when it comes time to deliver new hardware.

Driver support is still solid. Performance is great. The user interface continues to be effective. And for the channel, it continues to do what customers need at a margin and price that works for everyone.

Faithful readers will remember that last year we actually bestowed this crown on Windows Vista, so they might rightly ask, what gives? It comes down to promise. Last year, Vista packed nothing but huge potential for the channel. But now that we've gotten our hands on it and put it through its paces, we have to say that its promise was not met.

Solution providers say XP is still king because it just works, and its hardware and service requirements still often make it the best pick for customers. To put it another way, we really didn't know how good we had it with Windows XP until Vista came to town.

—Edward F. Moltzen & Mario Morejon



# Wireless

**WINNER: EXTRICOM INTERFERENCE-FREE EXWO-404 WLAN SWITCH**

**P**erhaps it's just the inner thumb-sucking kid in us that loves the idea of a "blanket" of Wi-Fi coverage, but we're sold on Extricom's WLAN technology.

From VoIP to streaming video to file sharing, everyone is cutting the cord in favor of transmitting data through the air. Wireless is quickly becoming a mission-critical technology for many customers.

That's why we laud Extricom for putting so much focus on solving interference problems. Mobile devices transmitting on 2.4GHz, such as cordless phones, Bluetooth devices and even some popular gaming consoles, can interfere with the wireless network.

Having multiple local wireless networks within an office or among different businesses within the same

building can also cause problems for a mobile user moving around the floor.

The WLAN enterprise solution from Israel-based Extricom handles the interference and simplifies Wi-Fi deployment for businesses. The *CRN* Test Center selected the Extricom Interference-Free EXWO-404 WLAN Switch as the Wireless Product of the Year for its robust features. The switch, built on the vendor's channel blanket architecture, creates a coverage area where users can move from one access point to another without any hand-off latency. Putting all the access points on the same channel and frequency, different from other networks and competing products, eliminates interference concerns. And the simplicity of deployment and maintenance make it perfect for the SMB looking to ditch the wires.

The vendor's WLAN switch also creates separate channel blankets to physically segregate different user types, traffic types and roles to improve quality of service, such as streaming video on one channel and passing VoIP data on another.

As trends shift toward triple-play and other services, solution providers need products

that can support critical applications without worrying about performance, resiliency and scalability. And that's what Extricom offers.

—Fahmida Y. Rashid



# Security

**WINNER: SONICWALL TZ 180**

**T**hreats to the network continue to increase, and the number of solution providers that need to dive into unified threat management for small and midsize businesses is jumping as well. Simply put: Security is a bigger deal than ever before.

Enter SonicWall's TZ 180, a device that is capable of taking on network threats, scanning files and preventing unwanted network intrusions, all without sapping network bandwidth.

It's no wonder, then, that the *CRN* Test Center chose the SonicWall appliance as the Security Product of the Year for 2007. Importantly for VARs and integrators that work inside SMB accounts, the SonicWall TZ 180 is pretty simple to install. It's wizard-driven once the appliance is registered, and the vendor has a portal, MySonicWall.com,



where solution providers can manage a variety of UTM products and multiple licenses.

The TZ 180 is a second-generation UTM product. SonicWall has tweaked the software so it's able to keep up with business-class cable and DSL connections—now business-critical in the SMB segment. The TZ 180 works by initiating a deep-scanning process of files entering the network, checking the packets for signatures that match its database, and managing incoming threats.

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## Application

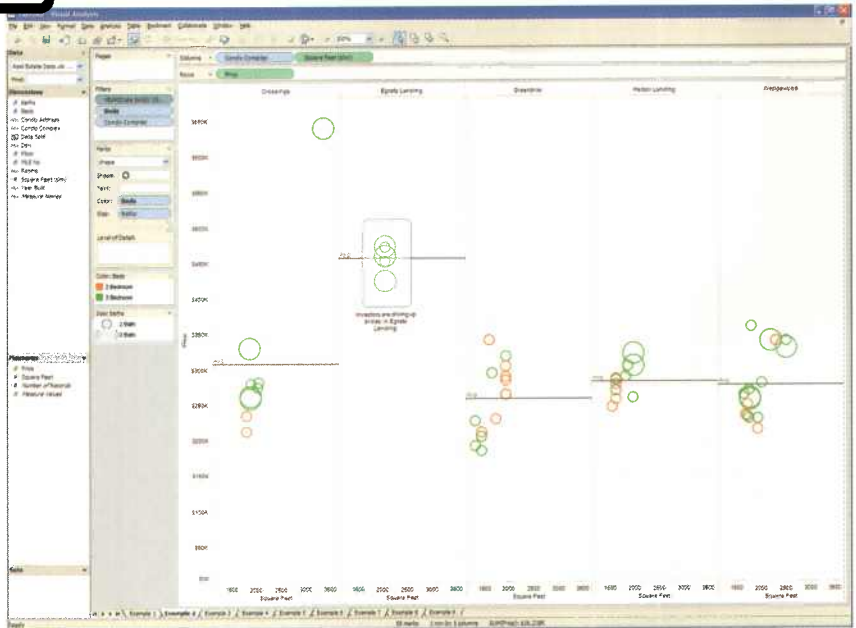
WINNER: **TABLEAU v3.0**

**A**t the heart of many small businesses is a big business waiting to break out, but sometimes that's prevented by reams of data that are simply smothering. Not to worry, though. CRN Test Center's Application of the Year for 2007 is a tool that can turn a solution provider into a hero for that small business—or any midsize or large client for that matter.

Tableau v3.0, from Seattle-based Tableau Software, is a breathtakingly simple-yet-powerful data analysis toolset that, once deployed, permits data to be sliced, diced and viewed from every angle in a friendly, graphical interface. Developed by Academy Award-winning Stanford Professor Pat Hanrahan (a Pixar founder of "Toy Story" fame) and colleague Chris Stolte, Tableau 3.0 takes visual analytics to new heights.

Here's how it works: Tableau permits the creation of dashboards where users can create multiple views of data using live links. The dashboards are not separated by a tier as with other enterprise business intelligence (BI) dashboards. And they're not Web components that run apart from BI middleware. The dashboards are directly linked to Tableau's engine. The data is live, it's dynamic and it's grouped into a single framework.

What makes this application friendly to any business user is that it allows data to be viewed and manipulated with drag-and-drop ease. A set of data—like store sales on a Saturday and Sunday—can be analyzed by product, by time of day,



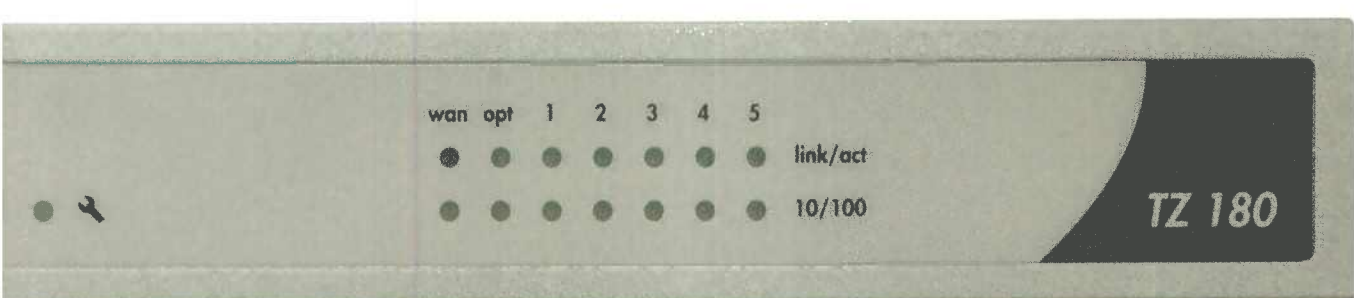
by discount levels or sales rep. Solution providers don't have to provide extensive training or hand-holding.

Tableau Professional Desktop, with analysis and visualization features, connects to all Tableau-supported data sources and supports Microsoft Windows Vista, Windows XP, 2003 or 2000. It's not a hog, either—it requires only 35 Mbytes of free disk space.

Any data visualizations created in Tableau Desktop can then be published to Tableau Server and shared via a Web browser. The company is also offering a Web portal, which connects its dashboard views directly into Tableau Server and its worksheets.

No other BI tool on the market is as flexible or as easy to use as Tableau.

—Edward F. Moltzen & Mario Morejon



In addition, the TZ 180 is able to provide stateful packet inspection.

With all of this, SonicWall, Sunnyvale, Calif., has taken security technology that was once the province of the largest enterprises and scaled it to fit smaller and midsize deployments.

We were also impressed by the support that's bundled with the product. SonicWall's TotalSecure solution for the TZ 180 includes one year of support for antivirus, antispyware, gateway and intrusion-prevention services.

On the partnership front, SonicWall works with solution providers during subscription periods.

The TZ 180 also offers a year of content-filtering services, which includes protection against phishing attacks. SonicWall updates its appliances regularly with lists of phishing sites.

So if you've got an SMB network to protect, there's no better choice than the TZ 180.

—Edward F. Moltzen & Mario Morejon