

# Once you announce a date, you're already late

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Steve Sinofsky (who used to blog on careers at Microsoft for college grads and more recently oversaw the Engineering Windows 7 blog) said something that stuck with me: Once you announce a date, you're already late. Such is the nature of media coverage of the software industry. You can talk all you want about what the product does, but once you begin to speculate about a ship date, all your discussion may as well never have happened. All anybody cares about any more is how far behind schedule you are. (And as far as the media are concerned, you are already behind schedule.) The ship date countdown clock goes up, and all anybody writes about is how your product has been delayed a week, a month, whatever. Even if your original schedule was a purely speculative guess that you pulled out of your butt and the updated schedule is based on some preliminary analysis, the headline won't be "Microsoft refines schedule for Project X." It'll be "Project X slips three months." The article will probably begin "Project X, announced by Microsoft scarcely two weeks ago, is already in deep trouble, suffering a three-month schedule slip even before it gets out of the gate." I was reminded of this adage (and use it as my standard answer to questions I'm not authorized to answer) when a Microsoft executive attending RSA Conference 2007, a computer security conference, was asked to speculate on when the next version of Windows would be ready. If you read what he actually said, you can tell that he was just making a guess on the spot, but the next thing you know, the "ship date" makes not only the article headline, but also becomes the top headline on InfoWorld's conference coverage and sparks a discussion on Slashdot. Up goes the countdown clock. Even long after the conference is over, it still is listed as the number two headline for the entire conference, even though it has nothing to do with the conference! We don't know what it is, but whatever it is, it's already late.

## Bonus example:

- An Update on the Windows Roadmap says, "our plan is to deliver Windows 7 approximately 3 years after the January 2007 general availability launch date of Windows Vista."
- This plan is immediately converted to a hard ship date: Microsoft VP confirms Windows 7 ship date: January 2010.

- After a few months, this date moves beyond a confirmation to a *promise*: “Officially, Microsoft has promised that it will be out before the third anniversary of Vista’s January 2007 mainstream launch.”

What started out as a plan turned into a confirmed ship date and then a promise.

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