

Microsoft video gets a little too much attention

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FILE -- An undated file photo of a combo of product images provided by Microsoft Corp., shows the packaging for the 3 versions of Microsoft Windows 7, Home Premium, Professional and Ultimate. (AP Photo/Microsoft Corp.)

(AP) -- You almost have to feel bad for Microsoft. The software maker isn't known for hip marketing tactics, and now that a Windows 7 video has hit it big online, people are laughing at the company, not with it.

Few details for the launch of [Microsoft](#) Corp.'s next PC operating system have been made public, though it's a safe bet Oct. 22 won't feature acrobats climbing buildings and unfurling banners in New York, as was the case for Windows Vista in 2007.

One thing we do know is that Microsoft hired House Party Inc. to bring the Windows 7 buzz into living rooms around the world.

House Party, based in Irvington, N.Y., and Denver, helps companies get in front of real people by supplying materials for, well, house parties.

The agency vets volunteer hosts, then sends decorations, products and suggestions for activities. Upcoming parties will promote things like Hunt's canned tomatoes, Martha Stewart's line of craft tools and avocados from Mexico.

And Windows 7.

The plan surfaced in early September: People in 12 countries including the U.S., India and Mexico could sign up to be hosts. Example photos on House Party's Web site showed friends and families smiling, laughing, drinking, eating and peering intently at laptops. Hosts would get a copy of Windows 7, plus items like Windows-branded napkins, a table centerpiece and tote bags for guests.

Now, Oct. 22 is fast approaching and hosts are busy planning! To help, House Party posted a series of instructional videos on YouTube. And there the fun begins.

A video entitled "Hosting Your Party" takes place in a balloon-festooned kitchen. Two men and two women of various ages reflect on their own Windows 7 launch party experiences while scuttling about preparing food platters. Chummy laughter and knowing smiles abound as they dish out advice.

Such as: "When everyone was there and settled, I led an overview of some of my favorite Windows 7 features. I showed my guests things from two of the Windows 7 orientation videos, and it took like 10 minutes," gushes a perky blond woman. "Oh, and you know what was great? It was totally informal. Like, everyone just kind of crowded around the computer in the kitchen."

The banter - and overacting - continues for six minutes, though keen

observers noticed that hours elapse on the oven clock in the background. There's lots of talk of "activities."

Online news sites and bloggers latched on to the painfully earnest production. A parody emerged in which someone bleeped out references to Windows 7, making the whole thing sound dirty. The original video has logged more than 800,000 views.

It's enough to make you wonder if one of the actors was speaking his mind and not just reading from a script when he uttered this line in the video: "Can you believe that Microsoft put the launch of Windows 7 in our hands? Are they nuts or what?"

To be fair to Microsoft: It did not make these videos, though it reviewed them before they were posted.

Nor did House Party set out to make slick TV commercials for [Windows 7](#). The videos were put together quickly, said Kitty Kolding, House Party's CEO, as an alternative to handing party hosts a software user manual.

"Keep in mind that what we are trying to create an experience around in people's homes is an operating system," Kolding said in an interview. "It's not a cool gadget, it isn't a new potato chip, it's an operating system."

Kolding said House Party tried to find the right tone for demonstrating activities like burning CDs, editing photos and learning a new task bar interface - things that, let's face it, aren't obvious party activities.

The results may have invited high-profile mockery but the idea resonated with hundreds of thousands of people who applied to be hosts.

"Make fun all you want," Kolding said. "Microsoft got an incredible global response."

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