Fear, uncertainty and doubt

*Fear, uncertainty and doubt* (FUD) is a tactic used in sales, marketing, public relations, politics and propaganda. FUD is generally a strategic attempt to influence public perception by disseminating negative and dubious/false information designed to undermine the credibility of their beliefs. An individual firm, for example, might use FUD to invite unfavorable opinions and speculation about a competitor's product; to increase the general estimation of switching costs among current customers; or to maintain leverage over a current business partner who could potentially become a rival.

FUD techniques may be crude and simple, as in claiming "I read a paper by a Harvard professor that shows you are wrong regarding subject XXX", but the paper does not exist. (Were the paper to exist then it would not be FUD but valid criticism.) Alternatively FUD may be very subtle, employing an indirect approach. Someone who employs FUD cannot generally back up their claims (e.g., "I don't recall which professor or which year the paper is from"). To dispel FUD, the easiest way is to ask for details and then provide well researched hard facts which disprove them. For instance, if it can be shown that no Harvard professor has ever written a paper on subject XXX, then the FUD is dispelled.

The term originated to describe disinformation tactics in the computer hardware industry and has since been used more broadly. FUD is a manifestation of the appeal to fear.

**Definition**

FUD was first defined (circa 1975) by Gene Amdahl after he left IBM to found his own company, Amdahl Corp.: "FUD is the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that IBM sales people instill in the minds of potential customers who might be considering Amdahl products."

The term has also been attributed to veteran Morgan Stanley computer analyst Ulrich Weil, though it had already been used in other contexts as far back as the 1920s.

As Eric S. Raymond writes:

> The idea, of course, was to persuade buyers to go with safe IBM gear rather than with competitors' equipment. This implicit coercion was traditionally accomplished by promising that Good Things would happen to people who stuck with IBM, but Dark Shadows loomed over the future of competitors' equipment or software. After 1991 the term has become generalized to refer to any kind of disinformation used as a competitive weapon.

By spreading questionable information about the drawbacks of less well known products, an established company can discourage decision-makers from choosing those products over its own, regardless of the relative technical merits. This is a recognized phenomenon, epitomized by the traditional axiom of purchasing agents that "nobody ever got fired for buying IBM equipment". The result is that many companies' IT departments buy software that they know to be technically inferior because upper management is more likely to recognize the brand.
Contemporary examples

Microsoft

Although originally associated with IBM, from the 1990s on the term became most often associated with software industry giant Microsoft. Roger Irwin said:[8]

"Microsoft soon picked up the art of FUD from IBM, and throughout the 80's used FUD as a primary marketing tool, much as IBM had in the previous decade. They ended up out FUD-ding IBM themselves during the OS2 vs Win3.1 years.

The leaked internal Microsoft "Halloween documents" stated "OSS [Open Source Software] is long-term credible… [therefore] FUD tactics cannot be used to combat it."[9] Open source software, and the GNU/Linux community in particular, are widely perceived as frequent targets of Microsoft FUD:

• Statements about the "viral nature"[10] of the GNU General Public License (GPL).
• Statements that "...FOSS [Free and open source software] infringes on no fewer than 235 Microsoft patents," before software patent law precedents were even established.[11]
• Statements that Windows has lower total cost of ownership (TCO) than Linux, in Microsoft's "Get-The-Facts" campaign. It turned out that they were comparing Linux on a very expensive IBM Mainframe to Windows on a PC.
• Statements that "If an open source software solution breaks, who's gonna fix it?'"[12]

Apple

Apple's claim that iPhone jailbreaking could potentially allow hackers to crash cell phone towers was labelled as FUD by the EFF.[13]

SCO vs. IBM

The SCO Group's 2003 lawsuit against IBM, claiming $5 billion in intellectual property infringements by the free software community, is an example of FUD. IBM argued in its counterclaim that SCO is spreading "fear, uncertainty, and doubt".[14]

Magistrate Judge Wells wrote (and Judge Kimball concurred) in her order limiting SCO's claims: "The court finds SCO's arguments unpersuasive. SCO's arguments are akin to SCO telling IBM, 'sorry we are not going to tell you what you did wrong because you already know...' SCO was required to disclose in detail what it feels IBM misappropriated... the court finds it inexcusable that SCO is... not placing all the details on the table. Certainly if an individual were stopped and accused of shoplifting after walking out of Neiman Marcus they would expect to be eventually told what they allegedly stole. It would be absurd for an officer to tell the accused that 'you know what you stole I'm not telling.' Or, to simply hand the accused individual a catalog of Neiman Marcus' entire inventory and say 'it's in there somewhere, you figure it out.' "[15]

Regarding the matter, Darl McBride, President and CEO of SCO, made the following statements:

1. "IBM has taken our valuable trade secrets and given them away to Linux."
2. "We're finding... cases where there is line-by-line code in the Linux kernel that is matching up to our UnixWare code"
3. "...unless more companies start licensing SCO's property... [SCO] may also sue Linus Torvalds... for patent infringement."
4. "Both companies [IBM and Red Hat] have shifted liability to the customer and then taunted us to sue them."
5. "We have the ability to go to users with lawsuits and we will if we have to, "It would be within SCO Group's rights to order every copy of AIX [IBM's proprietary UNIX] destroyed,"
6. "As of Friday, June 13 [2003], we will be done trying to talk to IBM, and we will be talking directly to its customers and going in and auditing them. IBM no longer has the authority to sell or distribute AIX and customers no longer have the right to use AIX software"
7. "If you just drag this out in a typical litigation path, where it takes years and years to settle anything, and in the meantime you have all this uncertainty clouding over the market..."
8. "Users are running systems that have basically pirated software inside, or stolen software inside of their systems, they have liability."[16]

The campaign evidently worked, as SCO stock skyrocketed from under $3 a share to over $20 in a matter of weeks in 2003. (It later dropped to around[17] $1.20—then crashed to under 50 cents on August 13, 2007 in the aftermath of a ruling that Novell owns the UNIX copyrights).[18]

**Real estate agents**

In response to a growing number of homeowners forgoing the use of real estate agent services during the sale of their homes, national and regional real estate boards have adopted a strategy of fear, uncertainty and doubt. Ads reinforce consumers’ anxiety over legal paperwork, and suggest that consumers are weak, intellectually lazy and fearful; that consumers can't possibly learn; and that it would be much safer to leave the process to a real estate agent.[19] [20]

**Security industry and profession**

FUD is also widely recognized as a tactic used to promote the sale or implementation of security products and measures. While there are many true security threats and breaches, it is possible to find pages describing purely artificial problems. Such pages frequently contain links to the demonstrating source code that does not point to any valid location and sometimes even links that “will execute malicious code on your machine regardless of current security software”, leading to pages without any executable code.

The drawback to the FUD tactic in this context is that, when the stated or implied threats fail to materialize over time, the customer or decision-maker frequently reacts by withdrawing budgeting or support from future security initiatives.[21]

**Non-computer uses**

FUD is now often used in non-computer contexts with the same meaning. For example, in politics one side can accuse the other of using FUD to obscure the issues. For example, critics of George W. Bush accused Bush's supporters, most notably the Swift Boat Veterans For Truth, of using a FUD-based campaign in the 2004 U.S. presidential election.[22]

According to some commentators, examples of political FUD are: "domino theory", "electronic Pearl Harbor", and "weapons of mass destruction".[23]

The FUD tactic was used by Caltex Australia in 2003. According to an internal memo, which was subsequently leaked, they wished to use FUD to destabilise franchisee confidence, and thus get a better deal for Caltex. This memo was used as an example of unconscionable behaviour in a Senate inquiry. Senior management claimed that it was contrary to, and did not reflect company principles.[24]

More recently, Clorox was the subject of both consumer and industry criticism for advertising its GreenWorks line of allegedly environment-friendly cleaning products using the slogan, "Finally, Green Works."[25] The slogan implied both that "green" products manufactured by other companies which had been available to consumers prior to the introduction of Clorox's GreenWorks line had all been ineffective, and also that the new GreenWorks line was at least as effective as Clorox's existing product lines. The intention of this slogan and the associated advertising campaign has been interpreted as appealing to consumers' fears that products from companies with less brand recognition are less trustworthy or effective. Critics also pointed out that, despite its representation of GreenWorks
products as “green” in the sense of being less harmful to the environment and/or consumers using them, the products contain a number of ingredients advocates of natural products have long campaigned against the use of in household products due to toxicity to humans or their environment. All three implicit claims have been disputed, and some of their elements disproven, by environmental groups, consumer-protection groups, and the industry self-regulatory Better Business Bureau.\footnote{27}

References

\begin{enumerate}
\item The term FUD is also alternatively rendered as “Fear Uncertainty and Disinformation”. See e.g., Jansen, Erin (2002). \textit{Netlingo}. Ojai.: NetLingo. ISBN 0970639678. p. 179.
\item For example, FUD has been used to describe social dynamics in contexts where sales, lobbying or commercial promotion is not involved.Elliott, Gail (2003). \textit{School Mobbing and Emotional Abuse}. Philadelphia: Brunner-Routledge. ISBN 0415945518.
\item "Suspicion has no place in our interchanges; it is a shield for ignorance, a sign of fear, uncertainty, and doubt." Caesar Augustus Yarbrough, The Roman Catholic Church Challenged, p. 75. The Patriotic Societies of Macon, 1920.
\item "Again he was caught in a tempest of fear, uncertainty, and doubt." Monica Mary Gardner, The Patriot Novelist of Poland, Henryk Sienkiewicz, p. 71. J.M. Dent ; E.P. Dutton & Co, 1926.
\item Open Source Initiative. " Halloween I: Open Source Software (New?) Development Methodology (http://www.catb.org/~esr/halloween/)
\item Press release from Microsoft which has viral nature of open-source quote (http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/features/2001/may01/05-03csm.mspx).
\item (http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2009/07/jailbreak/)
\item The SCO Group v IBM - answer to amended complaint and counterclaims (http://www.groklaw.net/pdf/Doc-27.pdf) (Undecided, US District Court - Utah, Kimball J, filed 6 August 2004) Section E, paragraph 22
\item The SCO Group v IBM - ORDER GRANTING IN PART IBMs MOTION TO LIMIT SCO's CLAIMS (http://www.groklaw.net/article.php?story=20060628200337917) (Undecided, US District Court - Utah, Kimball J, filed 6 August 2004) Section IV, paragraphs 33-34
\item http://www.warwickhughes.com/petrol/fudctx.gif
\end{enumerate}
External links

- FUDZilla (http://www.libervis.com/x/modules/mylinks/) (archived project on Libervis)
- Business article: Don't let FUD kill your business goals (http://opensource.com/business/10/3/dont-let-fud-kill-your-business-goals)

This article is based in part on the Jargon File, which is in the public domain.

License

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/