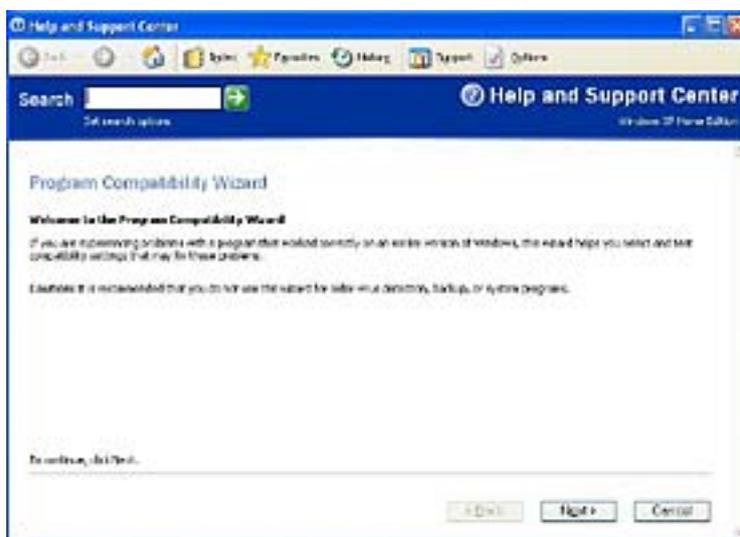


## Is DOS Gaming Dead?

After trying and mainly failing for the last several weeks to get a handful of old DOS games that I have had an urge to play again to run on a modern PC, I have come to the sad realization that if DOS gaming is not yet dead like I questioned in the title of this article, then it is certainly on life support. Let me take you back to the start of my DOS gaming journey and my reasons for making the above statement.

Since I am running Windows XP I decided a good place to start trying to play my dos games would be the Microsoft program compatibility wizard. After fooling around with a number of games I was able to get a few of them half-way working, but none of them with sound. Slightly more alarming than the lack of sound was the "not enough EMS" message I kept receiving no matter how much EMS I had assigned the program under the memory tab. At this point things weren't going too well, so having run into a wall I decided to look for some other solutions.

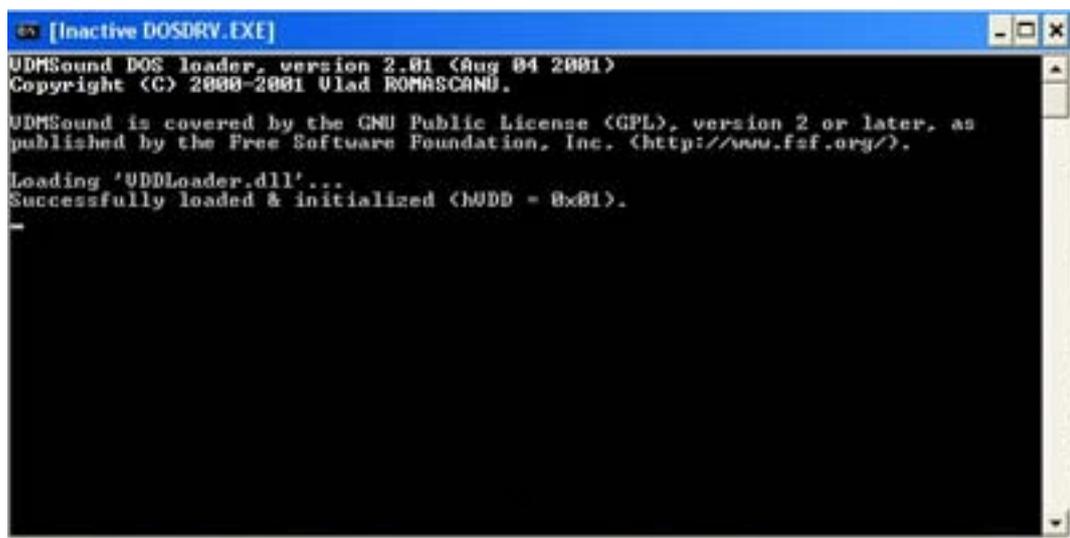
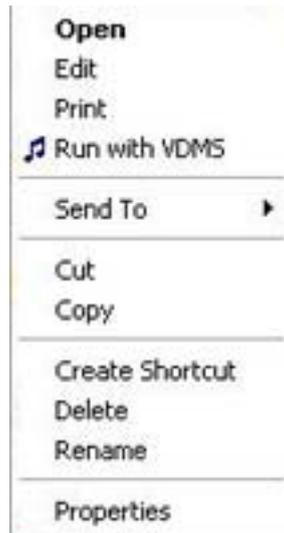


I remembered reading somewhere about a program called [DOSBox](#) some months ago. Where exactly I don't recall, but if I did I would certainly credit them here. If you are not familiar with DOSBox it is an OpenSource DOS-emulator used mainly for playing DOS games. DOSBox is a Beta program with the latest release at the time of this article being .61. As you can imagine, being Beta, DOSBox is not perfect: Some games run, some games don't. The creators of DOSBox have even assembled a [list](#) of what games work, and with what version to make things easier.



Several games on my personal hit list that I was determined to play when I started this quest run fine with DOSBox, including the original Monkey Island. While the graphics are so ugly they will make your eyes scream, the story--and in particular--the dialogue is IMO the best I have ever seen in a PC game and one of the only handful of times I have actually laughed out loud while playing a game. A lesson that could be well-learned from modern game designers who... Sigh. I guess that line of thought will have to wait for another article.

By now it was becoming obvious that there was going to be no one single solution to getting every DOS game running. What works for one game often doesn't work for another, so I headed on to [VDMSound](#). I have known of VDMSound, an Open Source Sound Blaster sound emulator for Windows XP for a while but had never used it. Could it be the next piece of the puzzle in my DOS gaming struggle?



Using VDMSound, the first DOS game I was able to get running was Duke 3D; although, I wasn't able to get it running in the VESA modes, so I consider this to be a partial victory only. In its defense VDMSound doesn't claim to be VESA support, but they do list it as "under consideration". I guess later I will have to look for a program to do that separately, too. (Update: Ken Silverman's NOLFB fixes the VESA issue) Like DOSBox, VDMSound also has a very useful and active forums.

Still determined to find a solution to the rest of my DOS games that won't run using the above methods, I decided it was time to temporarily take over my wife's machine that is at her insistence still running Windows 98. So I decide it's time to go old school. Eyes-a-glaze and a mad scientist cackling strangely emanating from my throat, I dig out my decade-old custom boot disk, put into the useless appendage of a floppy drive that I also beg my wife daily to let me remove and overwrite my blank autoexec.bat and config.sys files on the C: drive with those from the floppy. As the computer restarts I F8 boot to the system prompt, thinking to myself that THIS will show them; although, at this moment I am none to sure just who THEM is. Glass of Mountain Dew in my hand I sit down for some uninterrupted DOS gaming, completely convinced that nothing short of a power failure can stop me now. What I am greeted with instead is that damn No EMS error from earlier. But surely this can't be! I think, frantically typing in MEMCHECK, only to find that at less than 40K none of my UMBs is large enough to load the 64k page frame base address.

I have since discovered that this is a hardware error. Both of my nForce 2-based motherboards, one from ASUS and one from EPoX, use up all the UMB space and don't leave enough space to set the page frame buffer--therefore leaving EMS unavailable. It's very frustrating that no motherboard manual I have read makes note of this or offers a work-around for this problem.

Strange as it may seem I am actually considering what I like to think of as the final solution: building an old PC just to play the older games on, maybe a 1 GHZ CPU, and old SB 16 DOS 6/Windows 3.11 WFW. You know, a real dinosaur fossil. It all sounds very crazy but I would do it in a second if I had the extra space. I might even have enough old parts lying around; all I would need is a case and power supply. Another solution might be to find an old laptop and see if I could get it to work. Much as this issue has aggravated me I am not yet ready to give up. BTW, if you are reading this and you have any suggestions send them my way. If I get enough of them I will include them in a future DOS gaming article. For now, though, I have to go. Those Monkey Island pirates are calling my name.

[Jim Adkins](#)

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