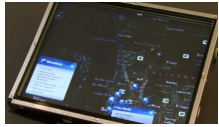


13 September 2008

By: Marius Oiaga, Technology News Editor

Windows 7  
Microsoft

## [Windows 7, Windows 8, Windows 9 – 1 Billion and Counting](#)

*Windows is not going anywhere, it's that simple*

Is Windows dead? Or, at least, is this the beginning of the end for Microsoft's proprietary operating system? And, if so, what solution/platform will be THE Windows killer? It's not like candidates are in short supply. From the Google Browser (Chrome) to Linux, Mac OS X, to RIA platforms, to dedicated thin clients, to Microsoft's very own Singularity and Midori non-Windows operating systems, Windows killers come in a variety of flavors, but none with sufficient kick to wash down Microsoft's flagship OS for good. At least, not for the time being.&nbsp;

### Windows 8 and Beyond

Microsoft has debuted planning for [Windows 7](#) even before Windows Vista hit the shelves at the end of January 2007. And, approximately a year ahead of the delivery of Vista's successor, the company is looking beyond Windows 7, planning for Windows 8, and even beyond that, for Windows 9. Even though it is indeed exploring non-Windows alternatives, with all indications pointing to the Midori incubation ending up as a commercial project, while Singularity will remain a research-focused initiative, Microsoft is, in fact, committed to Windows.

Following Vista's general availability, predictions pointed to the sure death of the mammoth Windows release. But Vista was not the last one of its kind, and neither will be Windows 7. The reason is sufficiently simple. Microsoft needs to ensure that the ecosystem of software and hardware products continues to integrate seamlessly with the operating system (ensuring support for legacy solutions) and, by doing this, delivering the best possible user experience to all customers - and they are quite a few, with Windows' install base of 1 billion strong and counting.

Microsoft Technical Fellow Mark Russinovich has revealed, in a recent [interview](#), that he is "working on Windows and day to day kind of architectural oversight and input into feature teams about what they're doing with the current release of Windows - [Windows 7](#), as we're seeing that through to the competition and then also doing longer range things with Windows like architecturally where should Windows be going, what are the important things Windows should be addressing in the next five years. So looking further out past Windows 7, into Windows 8, Windows 9."

### But What If the Ecosystem Turned on Microsoft?

The latest signs of what is advertised as a widening crevasse between Microsoft and its traditional partners come from HP. Reports indicate that Hewlett-Packard has put together a customer experience group designed to enhance Windows (specifically Windows Vista), in concordance with new touchscreen technology -&nbsp;this, even if [Windows 7](#), Microsoft's next iteration of the Windows client will feature touch capabilities by default. In addition, HP is also rumored to have considered building an in-house operating system, based on the open source Linux platform, in order to make its hardware independent from Windows.

Phil McKinney, chief technology officer in HP's personal systems group, confirmed to [BusinessWeek](#) the existence and work of the HP customer experience group. But,

otherwise, McKinney denied any HP efforts of building an operating system to replace Windows. "Our customers are looking for insanely simple technology where they don't have to fight with the technology to get the task done. For us, it's about innovating on top of Vista," he stated. Of course HP is flirting with Linux, and so are Dell, Intel and additional Microsoft partners, but this doesn't mean that Windows is going anywhere. Despite the inroads made by Apple into the PC market, the Cupertino-based Mac maker has an impact largely limited to the US. Internationally, Microsoft's OEM partners own the computer market with the biggest opportunities for growth on emerging markets.

"I think that one of the things that you have seen Windows doing over the last couple of years is reaching out and working more closely with the hardware partners, with the OEMs, to make sure that the systems delivered to users provide a good Windows experience and not one where Windows is loaded with a bunch of junk and also that the hardware is designed and capable of running Windows the way it should be run. And no "hey lets save a few dollars and put in 512 MB of RAM instead of the couple of GB that really make Windows." When you talk about the amount of cost for that these days, it's marginal and really the difference in user experience when you look at that is pretty drastic. So I think that's the way that we should continue to have these deeper partnerships with companies to make sure that customers do get a great experience," Russinovich stated.

#### And What If Microsoft Started Building Its Own Hardware?

The commitment to build Windows 7, Windows 8 and then Windows 9 is intimately connected with the strong response from OEMs to continue supporting the operating system. Microsoft accounts for in excess of 80% of the revenue of its Windows client division from licenses associated with Windows pre-loaded on new computers. But a divorce between Microsoft and OEMs could go both ways, as the Redmond company could develop and sell its own hardware. Microsoft Hardware is an excellent example of how the company has ventured past software, although the division is strictly focused on peripherals. Russinovich confirmed, however, that there had been discussions inside Microsoft in relation to adopting an Apple-model, by developing both the hardware and the software to go along with it.

"There's a lot of discussion about that and not just in the industry but also within Microsoft. Should we be developing the Windows notebook, or the Windows desktop. My opinion is that what has made Windows so successful is the fact that it's got an ecosystem with partners that are developing software and doing different things with hardware and software. And for us to block all that innovation, to block up that playground that people have to do cool things for customers that we can't think of, or have the agility to do, I think it's not the way that Windows has gotten successful and I don't think it's the right thing to do now. Not even in response to what people see as market pressure coming from other people that are doing that," Russinovich revealed.

Turning to alternatives such as Linux or dedicated OSes, limited to just a handful of tasks, is a business strategy that could potentially bypass Windows altogether. And, indeed, there is a consumer segment that wants a non-Windows alternative. Nevertheless, there is one inherent design flaw to such a scenario, namely locking out the ecosystem of third party solutions that currently orbits around Windows. In the end, a PC is not about a device with limited functionality, or that drastically reduces choice for consumers. The PC has never been about that. Windows has never been about that.

"The desktop PC (or laptop) is different because there is only a single PC and the roles are not as well defined. Only in the rarest cases is that PC dedicated to a single purpose. And

[...] the reality is that we see very few PCs that run only a specific piece of software and in nearly every study we have ever done, just about every PC runs at least one piece of software that other people do not run," revealed Senior Vice President, Windows and Windows Live Engineering Group, [Steven Sinofsky](#), at the beginning of September.

Both Russinovich and Sinofsky indicated that, as Windows evolved, and especially for [Windows 7](#), the Redmond company would, in fact, be working closer with OEMs. This because, in the end, it is not only new computers selling Windows, but also the Windows operating system helping the sales of new machines. Microsoft and its OEM partners continue to have a strong business model together, and a viable alternative to that is yet to be available.

"For Windows 7, we are working closely with our OEM partners to make sure it is possible to deliver the most streamlined experience possible. Of course OEMs have a ton of flexibility and differentiation opportunities in what they offer as part of setting up a new PC, and what we want to do is make sure that the "core OS" portion of this is the absolute minimum required to get to the fun of using your PC," Sinofsky explained.&nbsp;