

Microsoft Sees Complex Future for Software

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The next generation of applications will include local software and global services, resulting in a persistent hybrid model, says a Microsoft executive at the New Software Industry conference.

The software industry has a strong future regardless of whether its products are delivered as a service, as a component or in packaged form, Craig Mundie, Microsoft's chief research and strategy officer, said April 30.

Mundie, delivering the lunch-time address at the New Software Industry conference here, said that whatever the delivery mechanism, the bottom line was that there will be an ongoing demand for software in the future.

Acknowledging that services have a role in this future, Mundie noted that current communication capabilities had reached the point where services could now be offered in the cloud to complement them. "So, clearly, there will be services in the future," he said.

According to Mundie, the next generation of applications will include both local software and global services.

"But the word 'service' is a bit of an overloaded term. What is a service? It is going to be very important to tease these things apart in the future," he said. "For me, this is software provided as a service through the network, which is a large part of what Microsoft is trying to do with its Live platform, where every one of our products will have a service component in the future," he said.

The traditional concept of the platform is also not going away, he said, adding that there will rather be new ways of using the network to buy, install, service and deliver software.

"There will also be a class of infrastructural services like identity and presence that will have to be jointly developed," he said. "So, when the platform takes on a service component, it too becomes a platform, and developers will depend on the Web APIs, the services they can invoke. So what we are looking at is a persistent hybrid model."

Mundie added, "The critical thing to think about is how this parallel, bimodal environment emerges over the next few years."

He acknowledged that the client remains underutilized today, and that this low average usage makes cloud computing more appealing.

"There is a new world coming, and it will arrive in five years or so, plus or minus a couple, and this will change the current software dynamic in truly significant ways," he said.

There is no free lunch for traditional software anymore, he said, noting that dual-core systems are already here and, in 10 years or so there would be hundreds of cores of the kind we know today on an individual chip.

"So the applications we have are going to require a new programming model. This brings an interesting challenge, and I believe we will solve this and other challenges," Mundie said.

By the end of the next 10 years, the average PC will be 50 to 100 times more powerful than it is today, he said.

"So, do we take the largely idle client, add more capability to it and leave

it even more idle? I contend that will not happen, as all of this power needs to be leveraged. Someone will work out how to overcome the programming models and architecture challenges around doing this," he said.

Thus, in the future, there will be a way to effectively deal with concurrency and complexity, and the systems of the future will be loosely coupled, asynchronous, concurrent, composable, decentralized and resilient, he said.

"This is really the inverse of how we build systems today," Mundie said. "All of these things represent a change. I think the attributes of the fully productive computing of the future will include systems that are more reliable, predictable, humanistic, performant, context-aware, model-based, personalized, adaptive, immersive and with rich visualization."

Microsoft, like others, struggles with these complex systems, he said.

Asked if all of Microsoft's programs would one day be available over the Web under a SAAS (software as a service) model, Mundie responded that some of its applications were better suited to a hosting environment than others.

However, "What is important is to have all the important monetizations, and a matrix of all the different ways to pay, along with all of the applications that people want and the ability for them to chose the one they want in the way they want. Over time, we expect to have all our applications available in this way," he said.

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