

Microsoft: Hardware Trends Create 'Perfect Storm'

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Microsoft is moving to 64-bit server operating systems after Windows Server 2008, company execs say at WinHEC, praising the increased performance and security of the new hardware.

The significant hardware trends driving IT industry today have resulted in "a perfect storm," a time of great change and opportunity for the industry, Bill Laing, general manager for Microsoft's Windows Server division, told attendees here at WinHEC on May 16.

Microsoft is gung-ho about the transition to 64-bit computing for both the industry and customers. Chairman Bill Gates told attendees at WinHEC 2005, "The 64-bit generation has moved the bar higher and brought performance benefits, large memory support and an enhanced layer of hardware protection, especially the no-execute bit, which defeats a large class of exploits."

Now, the transition to 64-bit computing is underway, and, while that transition will be tough for companies like Microsoft and their partners, which have to rewrite their applications and drivers, it is the right thing for the industry to do, Laing said. He added that Windows Server 2008 would be the last 32-bit Microsoft server operating system.

"The transition to multicore is happening even faster than the move to 64-bit, and Windows Server 2008 is multicore-ready. Microsoft is also licensing by socket, not cores, on a chip," Laing said.

Windows Server 2008 will bring better reliability, security and manageability, and will be able to scale from the smallest to the largest systems, Laing said, before giving a demonstration of dynamic partition hot-replace, in which a failing unit is replaced while the system continues to run and does not need to be rebooted.

The server team plans a major product release every four to five years, with an update every two years or so, he said, while mainstream support for major releases will span five years, with ongoing support for another five years.

Windows Server 2008 was designed to be a foundation for a portfolio of server systems, Laing said, pointing to a product road map that includes Microsoft's midmarket solution Centro, Windows Server "Cougar," the next version of its small business server, and Windows Storage Server "Longhorn," all due to be delivered in 2008.

The update to Windows Server 2008, called Windows Server 2008 R2, is currently planned for 2009.

"Windows Server 2008 has a solid foundation for enterprise workloads and brings better manageability, with the server core, server manager and Windows PowerShell, as well as better security, with BitLocker, read-only domain controller and network access protection," he said.

Laing encouraged WinHEC attendees to run and test the product beta of Windows Server 2008, noting that there had been 100,000 download registrations for the beta in the first three weeks since its release.

On the virtualization front, Microsoft SoftGrid helps accelerate deployments, reduce the cost of supporting applications and turns those applications into dynamic, real-time services, Laing said.

He also referred to the interoperability deal with Novell, which supports heterogeneity across the data center - something enterprises had been calling for, he said.

In his keynote address about the Windows client, Mike Nash, corporate vice president for Windows product management, said there were 20,000 drivers in the box with Windows Vista, double the 10,000 for Windows XP and the 350 for Windows 2000.

When Vista was released to manufacturing the number of device drivers supported was 1.5 million, which rose to 1.7 million by the consumer launch on Jan. 30, 2007, and 1.9 million by May 2007, Nash said, calling for a shared focus to get the rest of the drivers written.

The Windows Logo Program is also outpacing that for Windows XP, with some 9,000 devices approved for Vista versus the 5,000 for XP there were at the same point in its life cycle, he said.

Nash also called on attendees to make sure that their products worked well with Vista and that the device drivers for them were of high quality. "Also, please continue to create solutions that take advantage of Vista and are certified for it as well," he said.

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