

Microsoft goes intercontinental via cloud and Surface

March 3 2009, by Glenn Chapman



This Microsoft Corporation handout image shows the Microsoft Surface, the company's first commercially available surface computer. Microsoft announced on Monday that it is going intercontinental with touch-screen Surface computers and a suite of business software offered online as services "in the cloud."

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Microsoft said it would expand availability of its surface computing platform to Europe, Africa and the Middle East. The product is already available in Canada and the United States.

Surface computers feature multi-touch and object-sensing screens in

table-top designs, allowing people to work collaboratively.

They can also allow businesses to automatically track what comes and goes. For example, a bottle of wine could be placed on a surface computer table in a cafe, with the price instantly posted to a customer's tab.

"We've received an overwhelming response from companies worldwide that are looking for innovative ways to engage with their customers and developers who want to create applications that were not possible with other technologies," said Surface general manager Panos Panay.

Microsoft says it has more than 120 partners in 11 countries developing ways to use surface computers in retail, health care, government, tourism, media, travel, banking, manufacturing and other sectors.

The US software giant is also stepping further into cloud computing, by letting businesses in 19 countries test its Business Productivity Online Suite.

The cloud computing trend has intensified as businesses struggling in dismal economic conditions reduce costs by using applications online as paid services instead of buying, installing and maintaining software on their own machines.

Microsoft is adding to its international menu Office Communications Online and Deskless Worker Suite software that handle tasks such as email, calendars, collaboration, and instant messaging.

"These services open up new possibilities for businesses to control costs while continuing to enhance the productivity of their employees," said Microsoft business division president Stephen Elop.

"Customers can save between 10 percent and 50 percent in IT-related expenditures as a result of deploying Microsoft Online Services."

Exchange Online and SharePoint Online are available for trial in several European countries, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States.

Organizations worldwide will be able to try the entire Business Productivity Online Suite in April, according to Microsoft.

Use of Business Productivity Online Suite software currently costs 12.78 euros per month per user. Deskless Worker Suite programs providing email and collaboration software costs 2.56 per month per user.

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