Intel boosts Facebook users power for research

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The world's largest computer chip company teamed with nonprofit group GridRepublic to create a "Progress Thru Processors" application based on the popular online social networking service's operating platform.

The application enables Facebook users to allot idle computing power to work on projects for Rosetta@home, Climateprediction.net or Africa@home.

Rosetta@home uses donated computing power to seek cures for cancer, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's and other diseases.

Climateprediction.net seeks to enhance understanding of climate change by predicting and testing weather models.

Africa@home is focused on finding effective ways to combat malaria by studying simulation models of disease transmission and the potential impact of new drugs and vaccines.

"The social and scientific utility of volunteer computing is a function of the number of participants; the more people we sign up, the greater the good we can collectively do," said GridRepublic executive director Matt Blumberg.

He said the relationships "will help bring large numbers of new people into volunteer computing, enabling research and discovery which would otherwise be impossible."

In July, Facebook reported that it passed the 250-million-member mark.

Volunteers taking part in Progress Thru Processors essentially provide researchers with an online pool of computing power that can be used to work on complex tasks that would be daunting for a single machine.

"Small contributions made by individuals can collectively have a far-reaching impact on our world," said Deborah Conrad, Intel vice president and general manager of corporate marketing.

"By simply running an application on your computer, which uses very little incremental resources, you can expand computing resources to researchers working to make the world a better place."

A beta, or test, version of the application was launched online at facebook.com/progressthruprocessors.

The application is designed to run unnoticed as a background process on computers, according to Intel.

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