New Intel chip a coup for Hollywood

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Intel CEO Paul Otellini pauses as he speaks to reporters in 2009. US chip giant Intel introduced Wednesday a speedy new generation of chips that thwart film piracy and enable quick handling of data-rich video and games.

US chip giant Intel introduced Wednesday a speedy new generation of chips that thwart film piracy and enable quick handling of data-rich video and games.

The second-generation Intel Core processors, referred to as "Sandy Bridge," have been built into computers big and small, many of which will be displayed at the Consumer Electronics Show kicking off here Thursday.

"This is the best product we've ever built," said Intel chief executive Paul Otellini. "We've shifted to processor-based graphics."

Building graphics computing into chips enables slick handling of games, images and video at a time when lifestyles are increasingly shifting to

online entertainment loaded with data sent online.

"We are hooked on the Internet," Intel vice president Shmuel "Mooly" Eden said while showing off Sandy Bridge-driven computers at a press event. "PCs (personal computers) are no longer a luxury, they are a necessity."

Sandy Bridge was welcomed by Hollywood and Bollywood film studios that have been reluctant to make prime releases available online to computers, where they could potentially be copied or shared without permission.

Intel worked with major US and India film studios, including Warner Brothers, DreamWorks, Yash Raj Films and 20th Century Fox to craft copyright-guarding technology into the chips.

Warner Brothers has avoided putting high-definition or 3D releases online because of the potential for piracy.

"You've taken the excuse away from us," Warner Brothers Home Entertainment Group president Kevin Tsujihara told Eden during an on-stage appearance.

"Sandy Bridge lets us put our content out there on a global basis."

Studios working with Intel will make hot releases available to Sandy Bridge-driven PCs through online services such as Cinema Now.

Films can be routed from PCs to TVs.

"Our partnership with Intel creates a game changing opportunity to provide consumers around the globe our highest value content in a secure environment," said 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment

worldwide president Mike Dunn.

Eden predicted that Sandy Bridge, with 1.16 billion transistors on each chip, would be "a cornerstone of the computer revolution."

A million PCs are sold daily, with consumers driving the market instead of businesses, according to Intel.

"The consumer is king, and queen," Eden said. "It is all about consuming and creating digital content."

People are shifting to communicating with photos and video instead of simple text email.

Sandy Bridge enables fast conversion of video for increasingly common tasks such as shifting digital snippets from personal computers to iPads or iPods, or transferring content from handheld cameras onto desktop machines.

The chips have enough power to smoothly handle real-time gesture-based controls and even enhance computer games with animated versions of players that mimic movements and facial expressions, according to Eden.

"Finally, we have enough computer power to deliver real-time interaction between us and the computer," Eden said.

"Soon, you will be able to take my face and I will be able to be the hero, or some would argue villain, in a game."

He predicted that in the coming two to four years, Sandy Bridge will enable advances that have people looking at computer keyboards as though they were from "the Middle Ages."

"Pretty soon, you will not know if you are in the real world or the virtual world," he said.

Sandy Bridge chips will be featured in 500 devices from mobile handsets to notebook and desktop computers, according to Intel.

Sandy Bridge will represent more than a third of Intel's revenue this year, and generate 125 billion dollars in revenue for the PC industry, Otellini predicted.