HP takes operating software into its own hands

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Hewlett-Packard on Wednesday announced that it is adding its own operating software to personal computers to augment the capabilities of Microsoft's Windows.

HP executives said webOS software from freshly-acquired Palm would complement Windows in machines designed to synch with the computer giant's smartphones, printers and a new TouchPad tablet computer built on the platform.

"It indicates, at least somewhat, an HP rejection of Microsoft," said Gartner analyst Michael Gartenberg.

"The fact that they said webOS is coming to PCs (personal computers) is indicative that there is something they are not getting from Microsoft right now."

HP bought Palm last year in a $1.2-billion deal evidently driven by a desire to get its hands on Palm's webOS software platform.

Palm began working on webOS five years ago and a Palm Pre smartphone running on the software was a hit at the major Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas early last year.

Since webOS is optimized for touchscreen controls as well as keyboards, it is likely that computers built with the software will take advantage of that increasingly popular user interface.

"The reason they would do this is presumably the Touch Smart line," Gartenberg said, referring to HP computers with touchscreen controls.

Building webOS into personal computers is part of a strategy to let HP gadgets easily swap or synchronize data, sometimes as easily as touching one device to another with a feature called "Touch To Share."

"Clearly, HP has something that is going to set them apart and that is scale," said NPD Group analyst Stephen Baker.

"Touch To Share is pretty cool, but it is something you can't do unless you are the hardware and the software guy."

HP boasts a billion customers in 174 countries and said it ships two personal computers and two printers each second.

HP executive vice president of personal systems Todd Bradley described the webOS smartphone, tablet, and computer innovations unveiled on Wednesday as building blocks in a long term plan to provide "connected experiences."

"With device proliferation and an explosion in online services and Web-based content we consume, more people are accessing more cloud-based content from more devices," Bradley said.

"No one has a consistent experience across devices," he continued, maintaining that HP was out to change that with webOS devices.

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