

Microsoft previews Windows 8, stresses tablets (Update 2)

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Microsoft on Tuesday pulled back the curtain on new Windows computer operating software that promised to power touch-controlled tablets in challenges to Apple's beloved iPads.

Microsoft pulled back the curtain on new Windows computer operating software designed to power not only personal computers but also rivals to Apple's iPad.

Windows division president Steven Sinofsky stressed touchscreen tablets on Tuesday as he boasted of the diverse types of hardware that Windows 8 will run after its official release.

Sinofsky was part of a Microsoft team that provided an in-depth look at Windows 8 to software developers at a BUILD conference the US technology giant is holding this week in southern California.

For more details on Windows 8, read: [With new Windows 8, Microsoft will show whether it can go mobile](#)

"We re-imagined Windows," Sinofsky said. "From the chipset to the user experience, Windows 8 brings a new range of capabilities without compromise."

Windows 8 was crafted to allow all kinds of computers to be controlled with taps or swipes of screens, gestures familiar to owners of smartphones or tablet computers.

The operating system was also designed to let separate applications work together and to synchronize files across various Windows 8 devices.

Sinofsky demonstrated the point by having a picture taken on a camera-enabled desktop computer pop up on a tablet.

"Windows 8 works beautifully across a spectrum of devices, from 10-inch tablets and laptops to all-in-ones with 27-inch high-definition screens," Microsoft said.

Windows 8 was shaping up to be Microsoft's answer to criticism that it had ceded the tablet computer space to Google's Android platform and Apple, which has dominated a market it ignited with the release of the iPad.

"It is a blend, a hybrid, that attempts to give a person the advantages of an iPad and the advantages of a Macbook Air (Apple laptop) in a single device," said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group in Silicon Valley.

"This is going to be interesting," he continued. "The hardware optimizing it will likely be some touch-enabled ultrabook."

Microsoft was so eager to get independent developers working on applications for Windows 8 that it gave tablet computer prototypes to each of the 5,000 BUILD attendees so they could begin tinkering with the software.

The week-long gathering will be crammed with sessions at which developers will be tutored in nuances of building applications for Windows 8.

"It's a lot about how developers can build applications that create this new touch-centric environment," said Wes Miller, research director at independent analyst firm Directions On Microsoft.

"Windows 8 is a redesign from the ground up," he continued while at the conference. "We are really hearing tablet size and up, all the way into supersized desktop computers."

Software savants unable to attend BUILD will be able to download developer copies of Windows 8 at dev.windows.com beginning at 0300 GMT on Wednesday.

Windows 8 has to hit several more milestones before a polished version will be released to hardware makers for installation in devices heading for market.

"This is a pre-release product," Sinofsky said. "You saw some little snafus today; there are going to be more of them."

Windows 8 will be refined with the help of feedback from developers. Microsoft declined to predict when a final version would be ready for release.

"We are going to be driven by the quality not the date and just be

focused on building applications right now," Sinofsky said.

Windows 8 was also crafted to complement Live computer programs that Microsoft offers as online services as part of a strengthening trend toward using applications in the Internet "cloud."

About 542 million people each month sign into Windows Live services, the array of which includes Hotmail email, SkyDrive file storage, and Xbox gaming, according to Microsoft.

Windows 8 will give rise to unusual new hardware designs fusing features of tablets and laptops, Enderle predicted.

"Think of this as Microsoft taking all the cards that we know, love and trust and throwing them in the air," Enderle said. "After next year the line will get massively blurry between laptops and tablets."

The analyst expected Apple to react by combining its winning software and coveted devices in creative new designs.

"I think Apple is going to have to respond to this and will probably be more out-of-the-box than the makers of Windows hardware," Enderle said.

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