

What to expect from the next generation of Windows

July 11 2014, by David Tuffley



Windows 8 is loved and hated in equal measure. So what will Windows 9 do differently? Credit: Microsoft Sweden/Flickr, CC BY-SA

The tech world is abuzz with speculation on what Microsoft is planning for the next generation of its operating system to replace [Windows 8](#).

It was always going to be difficult to create an operating system that bridged the gap between the mouse and keyboard-driven desktop PCs

and the huge market of touchscreen devices.

That was the challenge that Windows 8 was created to meet.

But when it was first released in 2012, customer reaction was [extreme](#) – people either loved it or hated it.

The Windows 8.1 upgrade was a major improvement through the creation of profiles for different hardware platforms from desktop to tablet, but strangely this has not translated into widespread uptake.

Slow to no uptake

By July 2014, Windows 8.1 had only [6.61%](#) of the total PC operating system market, while Windows 8 had even less at [5.93%](#).

[Windows 7](#) on the other hand, the version that 8 was meant to replace, is going strong at [50.55%](#).

It seems that many users who until recently had been running [Windows XP](#) – until Microsoft ended its support this April – decided to move up to Windows 7 instead of 8.

The reason people are avoiding the later version might have something to do with the perception that every other version of Windows is something of a dud.

Skipping generations

Observers have [commented](#) on the pattern that the good versions of Windows skip a generation – Windows 95 good, Windows Millennium not so good, Windows XP good, Windows Vista not so good, Windows 7

good, Windows 8 not so good.

If the pattern holds true, the next version of Windows is likely to be good. But why does this pattern exist?

Producing a rock-solid operating system is an expensive and time-consuming business. Getting your products to market where they can generate revenue is a strong incentive for developers to release software before it is fully debugged.

When you own more than [90%](#) of the PC [operating system](#) market globally, you might even be able to get away with having your users debug your software and pay for the pleasure.

While Windows 8.1 Update is not a whole new version, it would certainly seem to be the version that Microsoft *should* have released from the beginning instead of the half-baked [touchscreen OS](#) that so [incurred the wrath](#) of desktop and laptop users.

Project Threshold – is this Windows 9?

So what goodies are we likely to see in the next version of Windows (codenamed [Project Threshold](#)) when it is released sometime in May or June of 2015?

Long-time Microsoft watcher and confidante [Mary-Jo Foley](#) says that Microsoft will do its best to persuade [Windows 7 hold-outs](#) to skip 8 and go directly to 9.

That's a tall order considering I've already pointed out that still [more than half](#) of all PCs in the world are currently running Windows 7.

Threshold is designed to win back the desktop and laptop users who are

alienated by Windows 8.

These folks should be back in their comfort zone with Windows 9, where the user interface can be configured to work with whatever type of hardware you are using – desktop, laptop, ultra-book, smartphone or tablet.

In short, the look and feel of the OS will suit the hardware type.

If you run Threshold (Windows 9) on a desktop PC, you can have the familiar Windows Desktop interface that lets you to run existing applications.

Hybrid devices that can operate in both desktop and touchscreen modes will support being toggled between the Metro-tile interface (seen for the first time with Windows 8) and the familiar Windows desktop.

At the smartphone and tablet end of the market, there will not be a desktop environment at all, though it will allow you to run applications side by side.

In the meantime, around August or September 2014, we are likely to see the release of [8.1 update 2](#). This should be the last major release before Windows 9 emerges in the northern Spring of 2015.

The Windows ecosystem – PC, phone and Xbox

Threshold will extend to Xbox in an effort to create a common user experience across all elements of the [Windows ecosystem](#).

That common look and feel will be based around the Metro tile interface, except in the case of the desktop/laptop user who chooses to configure their system otherwise.

The Windows approach contrasts with the way Apple has kept its Mac OS, iOS and Apple TV recognisably different, though Apple achieve a degree of cross platform integration by means of services like iTunes and iCloud.

What do people really want?

Ultimately, what most computer users want is a system that is intuitive and well adapted to their needs, something that works seamlessly, something that allows them do their work and have their fun without unduly drawing attention to itself or wasting their time.

Some versions of Windows manage to approach this goal. Other versions fall short – and that is not okay for a company with the resources of Microsoft.

When you own such a large share of the market you owe it to your paying customers to give them the best possible experience, *every time*. Here's hoping Windows 9 manages that.

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