

Windows 10 aims to be core of connected devices (Update 2)

January 21 2015



Microsoft executive Terry Myerson describes features being built into coming Windows 10 software at a press event in Redmond, Washington, on January 21, 2015

Microsoft pulled back the curtain Wednesday on the upcoming Windows 10 operating system focused on bringing harmony to the diverse array of Internet gadgets in people's lives.

As it previewed the new operating system, Microsoft also unexpectedly added to the roster of modern gadgets with the unveiling of headgear that overlays holograms on the real world and lets wearers use their hands to interact with virtual objects.

By allowing users to work seamlessly over devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones, Microsoft hopes Windows 10 will renew its relevance in an age of mobile computing dominated by Apple and Google-backed Android software.

And in order to boost its takeup by the approximately 1.5 billion people around the world who use Windows-powered computers, in a change of policy Microsoft will allow free upgrades.

Microsoft also hopes to lure users with stunning new technology.

Chief executive Satya Nadella touted HoloLens capabilities that will debut with Windows 10 later this year as the next generation of computing.

The US technology titan is also trying to make it more natural to interact with devices, such as conversational-style speaking with the company's virtual assistant Cortana.

"The number of devices is just exploding around us," Microsoft's Terry Myerson said during a presentation to press and analysts at the company's headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

"It should be easy to put one device down and pick up another where you left off; technology needs to get out of the way."

HoloLens was touted as an entry to "the world's first holographic computing platform" which enables users to place three-dimensional

holograms in the physical world.

"Until now, we've immersed ourselves in the world of technology," Microsoft's Alex Kipman said while introducing HoloLens.

"But, what if we could take technology and immerse it in our world?"

Walking on Mars

Windows Holographic creates three-dimensional images in the real world, then lets people wearing the headgear reach out and manipulate virtual objects.



Microsoft executives Joe Belfiore (L), Terry Myerson and Alex Kipman pose wearing HoloLens eyewear that overlays 3D images on the real world, at a press event in Redmond, Washington on January 21, 2015

Examples shown during the event ranged from someone getting visual prompts during a routine home plumbing repair to being able to virtually walk on Mars and control a rover lander actually on that planet's surface.

Kipman said he invited virtual reality innovators, including Facebook-owned Oculus VR, to explore adapting different applications for the goggles.

"Holograms can become part of our everyday life," he said.

Nadella called HoloLens and Windows 10 a "mind-blowing" experience that will open a new type of computing.

"Today is a big day for Windows," Nadella said as Microsoft provided a look at its latest operating system at its headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

"We want to move from people needing Windows, to choosing Windows, to loving Windows; that is our bold goal for Windows."

Windows 10 is being designed with feedback from millions of "insiders" testing early versions of the operating system, Myerson said.

IE cedes to Spartan

Microsoft is so intent on distancing Windows 10 from its predecessors that it skipped directly from Windows 8, which failed to deliver on its promise as a platform for a variety of devices.



Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella touts Windows 10 and HoloLens capabilities at a press event in Redmond, Washington on January 21, 2015

The Windows 10 design creates a foundation on which developers can build applications for smartphones, tablets, laptops, desktop computers, and Xbox One video game consoles, he said.

During the first year after the release of Windows 10, the operating system will be available as a free upgrade for computers running prior generation Windows 8.1 or Windows 7 software.

Microsoft said it will also keep Windows 10 upgraded during the lifetime of devices.

Personalized virtual assistant Cortana, and its touted ability to answer

questions conversationally, will be now available on personal computers. Cortana made her debut on Windows-powered mobile devices.

Microsoft also unveiled a new Web browser code-named Spartan, which will have Cortana built in and ready to chime in at presumably helpful moments.

Spartan is poised to be the successor to Internet Explorer.

"Project Spartan is a new browsing experience tuned for being mobile and working across this family of devices," said Microsoft's Joe Belfiore.

Windows 10 is also designed to hook gamers, according to Xbox team leader Phil Spencer.

Along with modifications that allow for more sophisticated play on smartphones, an application for Xbox will let people use Windows 10-powered computers or tablets at home to play games with or against friends using one of the Microsoft consoles, Spencer demonstrated.

"I think there are lots of developers who want to bring their experiences to the Xbox," Spencer said.

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Citation: Windows 10 aims to be core of connected devices (Update 2) (2015, January 21)
retrieved 10 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2015-01-windows-microsoft-powered-devices.html>

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