

Microsoft hopes computer users show some love for Windows 10

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Last month, Microsoft closed its least profitable fiscal year in a decade. Annual operating income slacked 35 percent to about \$18 billion.

Aside from the Xbox gaming device, Microsoft has misfired in attempts to keep pace in the mobile era. Its Surface tablets have only recently been marked a success, and its moves into smartphones crumpled into costly disaster. Microsoft recently wrote down nearly all of the more than \$9 billion former Chief Executive Steve Ballmer paid less than two years ago for Nokia's phone-making division, acknowledging that it was trying too hard to sell phones that hardly anyone wanted.

"Microsoft's two biggest challenges: They are reliant on a PC market, and in mobile they are a rounding error in market share," said Daniel Ives, senior analyst at FBR Capital Markets.

Nevertheless, Microsoft continues to carry tremendous influence. Windows 7 remains the most-used operating system on traditional PCs, and it's a brand that corporate IT departments won't abandon any time soon.

Now, "the stage is set for Windows 10 to lead them into their next phase of growth, but as you see less demand for PCs, Microsoft needs to figure out what their next magic trick is," Ives said.

In his year-plus on the job, Nadella has generated ideas to turn around Microsoft - and diversify the way it makes money. There's computerized eyewear, slick consumer apps and special tools for businesses under development. But Windows 10 is as crucial as anything Microsoft has done because Nadella needs the enormous cash flow the operating system generates to keep investors from losing confidence as he rebuilds.

Microsoft fixed the gripes that made most people and businesses skip Windows 8 three years ago. The last major Windows upgrade excessively

Know someone required to use Microsoft Windows at work but who uses a Mac at home? Probably so.

As Apple has hopped from a global afterthought to the world's fifth-largest computer maker, Microsoft's Windows operating system has endured on its status as a must-have work tool, not something a user could love.

When Windows 10 goes on sale Wednesday, a new courtship begins. Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella knows that if Microsoft is to compete with Apple, Google and others for another generation, Windows must become desired.

"We want to move from people needing Windows to choosing Windows, to loving Windows," Nadella said.

The urgency is clear. Microsoft generates nearly one-fifth of its revenue from selling Windows to corporate information technology departments and computer manufacturers. As sales of desktops and laptops have fallen, Microsoft has suffered.

catered to tablet users, relied on Microsoft's online services and dismissed what turned out to be the beloved Start menu. Windows 8 suffered from an image problem; sales reflected that.

The Windows 10 upgrade preserves settings, such as background images, and can seamlessly sync them along with files and apps to other devices. Compatibility with older apps, printers and other mainstream peripherals hasn't been an issue. On computers with touch-screen capability, it works well whether controlled by touch or mouse and keyboard.

Windows 10 also makes standard apps faster and more robust. It's much easier, for instance, to connect a Gmail account with the Mail program. Personalization and alphabetization in the Start menu makes starting apps quicker. Cortana, Microsoft's virtual assistant counter to Apple's Siri, could be a huge timesaver for users hunting for files or just a fun source of entertainment.

Future improvements will be free and more frequent. They'll have been run by 5 million testers to limit hiccups.

"There should be fewer surprises when it hits the wild," said Steve Kleynhans, vice president at consulting firm Gartner Inc.

Some businesses have been so eager to switch to Windows 10, especially because of improved security features, that they've prepared for months. Michael Keithley, [chief information officer](#) for talent management company Creative Artists Agency, grew optimistic after his team's testing.

Replacing login passwords with facial scans was among the new items that excited Keithley. He expects the thousands of computers at CAA should be running Windows 10 instead of Windows 7 by the end of the year.

"There's a general belief that Microsoft under their new leadership has done a lot of positive things," he said. "Everyone's cautiously optimistic about Windows 10."

One new feature tells users what companion

Microsoft mobile apps they should download when a smartphone is connected.

Nadella has bought popular apps such as building game Minecraft and task manager Wunderlist. He's boosted efforts to develop Microsoft Office for iPhones, iPads and Android devices. Cortana is coming to Android and iPhones as well.

Building apps for non-Microsoft products won't just make life easier for Windows 10 users. Microsoft hopes they showcase Microsoft's innovation and persuade consumers to give Windows a second look.

At the least, they could form the basis of a new Microsoft. To make up for some of the expected decline in Windows revenue, Microsoft is banking on such things as greater usage of the ad-supported Bing search engine and increased sales of its apps and games.

"We're confident that these are the right levers to revitalize Windows and restore growth," Nadella told analysts last week.

New computers with Windows 10 installed will start appearing Wednesday, but the best deals and products are expected to arrive closer to the holidays. Microsoft, for its part, isn't expecting much revenue from Windows 10 this year. Some businesses say they won't do mass upgrades, but rather buy Windows 10 machines as needed, further slowing sales.

For consumers with Windows 7 or 8, Windows 10 is a free upgrade for a year. Otherwise, it costs about \$120.

Last week, the company launched a marketing campaign that reminds consumers Windows shouldn't feel like a necessity. TV ads showcase babies smiling, crawling and playing, with a voice-over by actor Ethan Hawke subtly mentioning Windows 10 features.

"They'll expect their devices to listen to them, and talk, and sing, and tell a funny joke," he says of the babies in an allusion to Cortana, for instance.

The ads acknowledge Microsoft's challenge: It's time to foster love for Windows, but it might take a generation.

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Windows 10 comes out Wednesday, but it might take a couple of years before it gains acceptance among big businesses, experts say.

Two issues will hold back upgrades for a bit. Businesses need to test key applications to make sure they work with the new operating system. And many only recently made expensive switches to Windows 7.

That's true for Northgate Gonzalez Markets, a Los Angeles-area grocer with about 40 stores and 2,000 computers.

Harrison Lewis, the company's chief information officer since 2011, said there's at least four applications crucial to Northgate that he'll have to test. The work could get underway mid-2016, with a companywide move to Windows 10 from Windows 7 taking place in late 2016 or early 2017. But he's in no rush because Northgate has had Windows 7 for just two years.

"There's not a burning need that there's a problem with Windows 7, and we're pining for something new," Lewis said. "We would have to do an upgrade for many reasons, not just because of Windows 10."

As upgrades ramp up next year into 2017, analysts will be watching to see whether businesses that still hand out corporate phones give Windows-based smartphones a try. There are security benefits from having corporate laptops and phones all running Windows, said J.P. Gownder, vice president and principal analyst at consulting firm Forrester Research.

"The best chance Microsoft has in mobile is going after those old BlackBerry enterprise customers," he said.

Although the transition won't be immediate, Gownder said businesses are bound to step up to

Windows 10 because of security improvements and the promise of a steady flow of less cantankerous updates.

"This is going to be very successful in the [enterprise](#) space," he said.

- Paresh Dave

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In the wake of the unpopular Windows 8, Microsoft exercised more caution with Windows 10. The new operating system arriving Wednesday restores items lacking in Windows 8, such as the Start menu, while providing welcome updates. Here are some highlights:

EDGE

Edge is a much-needed upgrade to the Internet Explorer browser, an alternative to Firefox, Chrome and others. New features include an ad-less "reading view" and the ability to draw notes on websites and then quickly share a screenshot. On the downside, Internet Explorer isn't dead; many apps work only with the slow, unruly and unsightly old option.

CORTANA

Cortana is Microsoft's "virtual personal assistant." Highlight a word on a Web page in Edge and Cortana loads definitions, details and explanations. Like Apple's Siri, Cortana understands naturally spoken commands. It answers questions, searches for files and heeds orders, such as "turn off Wi-Fi." Cortana draws data from users' calendars and habits to show weather and other personalized information.

'MULTI-DOING'

With Windows 10, users can view up to four apps at once on a single screen. Called "multi-doing," it's a multitasker's dream. After dragging and snapping a program to a corner of the screen, Windows now suggests other recently used applications to snap side by side.

The feature also works well across multiple monitors and multiple virtual desktops.

XBOX CONNECTIVITY

Have an Xbox One in the house? With a Windows 10 computer, gamers can play from any room in the house by streaming off the Xbox. Players can record and share clips from gameplay as they normally would. There are also chat and activity feed features, just like on Xbox. No word from Microsoft on parental controls for the Xbox streaming.

SPEED

Early reviews cut immediately to one topic: Windows 10 loads fast. Updates should be more frequent and take less time to install too.

New security features should also make for a snappier experience. Assuming the hardware is capable, facial or fingertip scans can replace passwords. A feature called Passport will let users unlock once and access many services without scanning again.

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