

## Microsoft's Longhorn Operating System Targets More Desktops

Michael A. Silver

While Microsoft's latest Windows project, code-named Longhorn, may be eye-catching, it is also an exercise by the vendor to regain control over the desktop market.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

---

### Event

On 27 October 2003, Microsoft previewed the next generation of Windows, Longhorn. Microsoft distributed early code to developers and said that the first beta test is planned for 2H04.

### Analysis

At first glance, Microsoft's next generation of Windows adds many of the visual cues that Apple Computer used in recent versions of its OS X operating system (OS). Transparency in windows, active thumbnails and striking visual effects have been the hallmarks of Apple OSs for years. With Longhorn, Microsoft intends to take advantage of 3-D graphics processors to give the OS a more high-tech, Xbox-like look and feel.

But Longhorn is about much more than a glitzy look and feel. Many of the features Microsoft is adding in Longhorn will result in increased lock-in to Windows. Microsoft has reached its dominant position in the OS and productivity software markets by controlling application programming interfaces (APIs) and file formats. In the past five years, Microsoft has lost some of that control as browser applications and Java have become more popular, and as an antitrust lawsuit disrupted Microsoft's efforts to bundle its client OS with other applications. Longhorn is Microsoft's attempt to regain control of these markets.

Microsoft wants enterprises to write browser applications that take advantage of Longhorn APIs, which means they won't work on non-Longhorn browsers. Microsoft also wants more types of data stored directly in the file system. It envisions address books, calendar events and e-mail as data replicated directly into the file system. While some vendors may appreciate this, others may not, as it means moving data out of their own proprietary store and into one controlled by Microsoft. Users will benefit via much faster searching and the ability to more easily find related files and items. Enterprises that want to take advantage of the new features will favor applications that comply. Gartner believes that Microsoft's applications will comply early on.

While enterprises may want to have their application developers start exploring Longhorn's interfaces, Longhorn is still far from delivered, and should not play a role in short-term planning. If beta 1 is planned for 2H04, the product is not likely to ship until late 2005 or 2006, and previous experience has shown that a product changes significantly between beta releases. Due to the scope of change (user interface, APIs and Microsoft's Next-Generation Secure Computing Base) as well as the amount of work required, mainstream enterprises will logistically be unable to begin deployments sooner than 18 months after the product ships (that is, 2007 or 2008). Enterprises should embrace Windows XP for new PCs and eliminate Windows 2000 through hardware attrition to insulate themselves from Microsoft's volatile release schedules.

**Analytical Source:** Michael Silver, Gartner Research

### Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Windows Client-OS Road Map: What's in a Code Name?" — Enterprises should view Microsoft's plans with more-conservative eyes and should consider adopting a strategy of managed diversity to insulate themselves from changes in Microsoft's road map. **By Michael Silver**
- "Keep Windows 2000 Longer, but Don't Skip XP" — Microsoft's announcement of an extended support life cycle for Windows 2000 is good news, but enterprises should not plan on skipping Windows XP entirely. **By Michael Silver**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access all of this content.)

## REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

---

### **Corporate Headquarters**

56 Top Gallant Road  
Stamford, CT 06902-7700  
U.S.A.  
+1 203 964 0096

### **European Headquarters**

Tamesis  
The Glanty  
Egham  
Surrey, TW20 9AW  
UNITED KINGDOM  
+44 1784 431611

### **Asia/Pacific Headquarters**

Gartner Australasia Pty. Ltd.  
Level 9, 141 Walker Street  
North Sydney  
New South Wales 2060  
AUSTRALIA  
+61 2 9459 4600

### **Japan Headquarters**

Gartner Japan Ltd.  
Aobadai Hills, 6F  
7-7, Aobadai, 4-chome  
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0042  
JAPAN  
+81 3 3481 3670

### **Latin America Headquarters**

Gartner do Brazil  
Av. das Nações Unidas, 12551  
9º andar—World Trade Center  
04578-903—São Paulo SP  
BRAZIL  
+55 11 3443 1509