

Microsoft WinFX Accelerates Need for .NET Adoption

Mark Driver

The WinFX family of developer interfaces will represent the most significant advancement in Microsoft application design since the introduction of 32-bit Windows. Developers will need to migrate their skills to .NET Framework.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 27 October 2003, Microsoft unveiled a broad family of new developer technologies focused on next-generation service-oriented applications and Microsoft's upcoming Longhorn operating system (OS).

Analysis

Microsoft focused on three core messages:

- New features planned for next year's release of "Whidbey" version (that is, version 2.0) of the .NET Framework.
- New functions in its upcoming "Yukon" SQL Server release.
- A new and sizable family of developer application programming interfaces (APIs), collectively called WinFX and targeted at the upcoming release of Microsoft's Longhorn OS. WinFX will include the core functions contained in Whidbey but will also add a new graphical user interface subsystem (Avalon), a new file subsystem (WinFS) and a new Web services messaging subsystem (Indigo).

In Gartner's estimation, these technologies represent the largest change in Microsoft's programmer interfaces since the introduction of Win32 with Windows 95 and Windows NT 3.1 nearly 10 years ago. WinFX will re-integrate the "managed code" concept introduced with the .NET Framework with the underlying OS — the entire Longhorn WinFX developer API will be based on managed code. Moreover, WinFX will replace Win32, which will be relegated to "legacy" platform status (just as Win32 relegated DOS/Win16).

Microsoft has not announced the official release date for WinFX and the Longhorn OS, but Gartner expects the release no earlier than 2006. Microsoft has released a pre-beta preview version of WinFX software development kit and expects to release the first official beta in early 2004. However, given the long lead time, Gartner recommends that developers expect changes (some substantial) before the final version.

Bottom Line

Gartner believes that WinFX represents a significant step forward in Microsoft application design, but progress will come at a cost. While established Win32 applications will continue to run, a new application that takes full advantage of Avalon, Indigo and WinFS will not be backward portable to platforms other than Longhorn; although, the .NET Framework will be a backward portable subset of WinFX classes. Furthermore, the changes introduced by the Longhorn OS and the WinFX developer framework should spur developers to migrate to the .NET Framework sooner rather than later. Developers should migrate their skills to .NET Framework managed code today to establish the experience and expertise needed to minimize problems in the eventual adoption of WinFX by 2008.

Analytical Source: Mark Driver, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Vendor Rating: Microsoft Still 'Positive' as Pressure Mounts" — Microsoft is strong financially and well-positioned overall, but its competition has changed. **By David Smith**

- "Microsoft Windows 2000 Professional Operating System" — Overview of Windows 2000 Professional desktop OS for businesses. **By Mary Hubley and Cynthia Lubrano**

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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
Level 7, 40 Miller Street
North Sydney
New South Wales 2060
AUSTRALIA
+61 2 9459 4600

Latin America Headquarters
Av. das Nações Unidas 12.551
9 andar—WTC
04578-903 São Paulo SP
BRAZIL
+55 11 3443 1509