

AMD Takes Aim at Intel With Stable-Platform Program

Mark A. Margevicius, Martin Reynolds

The Commercial Stable Image Platform (CSIP) program will enable AMD-based PCs to achieve enterprise-class stability. But AMD won't break Intel's grip on enterprise buyers unless major PC makers decide to build CSIP-based PCs.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 27 September 2005, Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) introduced CSIP, a program that aggregates parts from multiple suppliers into platforms guaranteed to remain stable for 15 months. Component partners include ASUSTeK Computer, Atheros Communications, ATI Technologies, Broadcom, ECS, Gigabyte Technology, MSI Computer and Nvidia. Conforming platforms will carry an AMD-sponsored CSIP brand sticker.

Analysis

PC engineers and IT administrators cite PC image changes as a constant source of operational pain and cost. Hardware changes require a requalification process, and possibly the creation of a new image. Creating and qualifying an image can consume three to six weeks of a technician's time. Reducing such changes is a key factor in lowering PC total cost of ownership (TCO).

CSIP's goal is to address this issue by giving corporate buyers access to platforms based on AMD processors that offer the stability these buyers expect from Intel-based platforms today. A stable-platform program is essential if AMD is to gain share in the corporate desktop market.

However, the broad range of AMD's partners allows for wide variety of possible system configurations. Intel-based PC platforms are very similar to one another, due to the narrow range of component choices. CSIP platforms will lack such consistency, making it harder to change suppliers and splintering the support base from the perspective of major software vendors. If CSIP settles firmly on an Nvidia-based platform, these issues would be ameliorated. Gartner believes that Nvidia is preferable to ATI because of Nvidia's experience in the enterprise chipset market through its server products.

The CSIP program is intended for regional assemblers, which can use CSIP-standardized components to create stable platforms — aimed at smaller businesses and government buyers — that are competitive with global vendors' products. AMD says CSIP is not targeted at major PC original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) such as Hewlett-Packard, Lenovo and Dell. However, these vendors could use CSIP components to deliver enterprise PCs. Such an approach would allow AMD-based PCs from these OEMs to match the consistency and stability of their Intel-based PCs, possibly loosening Intel's grip on large corporate buyers.

For most applications, desktop performance is irrelevant — acquisition costs and TCO are the key factors. CSIP will reduce some ongoing costs. However, we expect Intel PC OEMs to respond with competitive pricing against CSIP bids.

Recommendations

- Select products from major suppliers first, with CSIP qualification a secondary consideration.
- Investigate AMD platforms as a way to reduce PC acquisition cost.
- Give preference to Nvidia-based CSIP platforms when they are initially released.

Analytical Sources: Mark Margevicius and Martin Reynolds, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Do Not Change AMD/Intel Buying Decisions Because of Lawsuit" — AMD's antitrust suit against Intel will bring intense media attention, but probably will not affect either company's operations. **By Martin Reynolds**
- "AMD's Pacifica Marks Another Advance for Virtualization" — The arrival of Pacifica will help drive the advance of virtualization technology, which Gartner believes will transform the way PCs are used in this decade. **By Martin Reynolds**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access the documents referenced in this First Take.)

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