

## Silverlight 2 Slims Down .NET for Broader Reach

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Silverlight 2 brings .NET technology into browsers and across platforms, in a direct challenge to Adobe Flash and Flex. It will appeal to Microsoft-centric organizations but will not tempt most consumer Web developers.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

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### Event

On 5 March 2008, Microsoft released the beta version of Silverlight 2, a cross-platform plug-in that works on Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari and Opera browsers, on Windows and Macintosh platforms, and with some support in the future for Linux-based devices.

### Analysis

Silverlight 2 is a significant step up from Silverlight 1.0. It includes:

- A portion of the .NET framework, including a subset of the Windows Presentation Foundation graphics engine
- User interface controls and networking
- Cross-domain network access, communication based on representational state transfer (REST), and LINQ and XLINQ data queries
- Support for dynamic languages, such as the .NET versions of Python and Ruby
- Deployment enhancements, such as adaptive streaming to match user experience with bit rate, bandwidth throttling and real-time encoding

From a technology viewpoint, Silverlight 2 allows Microsoft to catch up to, and in some cases surpass, Adobe Flex. During the past few years, Adobe Flex has enjoyed a head start in both the market and the technology. Silverlight 1.0 (released in mid-2007) had little uptake because it was essentially a JavaScript-centric media player plug-in. Most enterprise developers lack the client-side JavaScript skills to make effective use of this. Developers in the consumer Web are conversant with client-side technologies but saw no compelling differentiation over Adobe Flash.

Silverlight 2 relies on the technology and tools that enterprise .NET developers are familiar with, such as C#, XAML and Visual Studio. Gartner sees pent-up demand in enterprises that are looking for a strategic rich Internet application (RIA) platform. A minority of enterprises have moved forward with strategic initiatives and have chosen Adobe Flex more than others. But the vast majority of organizations are uncommitted. They are still gaining an understanding of the business value of RIA and are waiting for offerings to mature from favored vendors such as Microsoft or IBM. Gartner expects Microsoft-centric organizations to take up Silverlight quickly. Developers in the consumer Web, who favor the open-source Linux, Apache, MySQL and PHP (LAMP) platform or Java over .NET, likely will not flock to Silverlight.

Most enterprise developers still lack the best-practice know-how and process methodology to deliver an effective user experience, regardless of technology. Therefore, Silverlight alone will not do much to improve the usability of corporate applications.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

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- **Developers in Microsoft-centric organizations:** Assess the Silverlight 2 beta for delivering rich user experiences in a cross-platform manner within popular browsers.
- **Enterprises that choose the Silverlight route:** Ignore v 1.0 and go directly to v 2.0, but align your development timeframes with the v 2.0 release schedule.

- **Development managers:** Invest in an enhanced development process centered around user needs and usability-oriented methodology before investing in any RIA technology.

## RECOMMENDED READING

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- "Key Issues in Rich Internet Application and User Experience, 2008" — Ajax and RIA adoption is shifting from the early adopter stage to middle adopters. **By Ray Valdes**
- "Microsoft Advances Its Web Strategy at MIX08" — Microsoft has taken the next step in its bid to appeal to Web developers and challenge Adobe with beta releases of new products. **By David Mitchell Smith and others**

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