

Google Chrome OS Points to Cloud- and Standards-Oriented Future

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Google's blog entry outlining its strategy to develop the Google Chrome operating system has sparked chatter in technological circles. Nevertheless, Google's plan will not affect enterprises for many years.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 7 July 2009, Google announced on its blog that it has embarked on a project to create the Google Chrome Operating System (OS). The company says that the Google Chrome OS will be an open-source, lightweight, Linux-based OS tightly integrated with the Chrome browser. It will initially be targeted at netbooks, starting in 2H10.

Analysis

When Google posted its intention to develop Chrome OS, the chatter that followed spiked the topic up the Twitter trend board and provided business media with a fresh riff on "clash of the titans" coverage on Microsoft and Google. A single blog post offering few details is not enough for enterprises and vendors to wager their futures on. But the reaction to Google's post offers evidence that Google has tapped into a reservoir of interest among workers, consumers and companies regarding a new and innovative generation of desktop offerings.

Google's long-rumored OS had seemed likely to be Web-centered. The company vision for the future of client computing encompasses rich Web applications, available both online and offline. We believe Google desires to spark a market that could include what would essentially be browser appliances, which could serve as elements in a trend toward cloud computing architectures.

Gartner defines cloud computing as a style of computing where scalable and elastic IT-enabled capabilities are delivered as a service to external customers using Internet technologies. For many years, in anticipation of the mainstream adoption of these concepts, Gartner has advised clients to choose a service-oriented architecture (SOA) coupled with event-driven architecture when designing new business applications, particularly those expected to see long-term use and to undergo continuous refinement, maintenance or enlargement. Google's announcement confirms the value of such strategies, as Chrome OS and its inevitable competitors will accelerate these trends.

Enterprises nevertheless should be cautious in their immediate reaction to the widespread chatter. Google is unlikely to position Chrome OS as a major system on the order of Windows or Linux, and will not initially pursue enterprise business directly. Workers will adopt it independently insofar as it is adopted at all; companies will find it on devices that appear in their systems through consumerization.

Google is institutionally patient while its strategies are individually brash. Its blog entry appears to commit the company to promoting standards-based heterogeneity not just in OS design but also in OS purpose and profile. Its behavior in partnering to promote the OS, in competitive positioning, and in transparency of its development will feed its effectiveness. Chrome OS will be an extremely visible effort to spread the value of computing, particularly network-based and cloud computing, to new kinds of machines in business or consumer environments. Gartner will monitor it to discern its successes, setbacks and unintended consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Enterprise IT managers:

- Do not expect a significant effect on IT operations for at least three years. If you are using a Windows platform and planning for an OS migration to Windows 7, do not change your plans because of Google's announcement.
- Expect an acceleration in innovation of technology solutions. Continue to invest in a Web-oriented architecture and SOA, which will help you prepare for the advent of cloud computing. If you run Web applications, move these forward to support the emerging set of Web standards, such as HTML5, CSS2.1, and interoperability protocols such as OpenID and OAuth.
- Prepare policies regarding the support of the Chrome OS in the event that employees bring their home installations into the business.

Developers:

- Continue to emphasize browser independence in application design. Favor architecture, plans and policies that give preference to OS-neutral applications.

Independent software vendors:

- Consider differentiation strategies based on leveraging modern Web standards and interoperability protocols. Maintain your focus on usability and a user-centered design process.

Additional research contribution and review: Annette Jump

RECOMMENDED READING

- "Getting Off Windows XP Is More Important Than Windows Vista vs. Windows 7"— Organizations may have less time than they think to make a decision on whether to skip Windows Vista and go directly to Windows 7. **By Michael Silver and Steve Kleynhans**
- "Windows 7 Won't Need SP1, but Will Still Need 12 to 18 Months Before Deployment Begins" — Organizations likely won't be ready to deploy Windows 7 before Service Pack 1 ships, so they will include it in their initial deployments. **By Michael Silver**

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