Google Seeks to Control Its Browser Destiny With Chrome

Published: 5 September 2008

Analyst(s): David Mitchell Smith, Ray Valdes

Google's introduction of Google Chrome is not simply a salvo in the "browser wars" of the past decade. Its primary purpose is to enable a more compelling user experience for Google's Web applications.

News Analysis

Event

On 2 September 2008, Google launched a beta version of its open-source Web browser, Google Chrome, for Windows XP and Vista. The beta is available for download at http://www.google.com/chrome. Google says that it plans to release versions for other platforms, such as Mac OS X and Linux.

Analysis

Google Chrome is a strategic initiative from Google, the culmination of a multiyear project involving significant resources and attention from senior management. Gartner believes Google was motivated to create Google Chrome by:

- Dissatisfaction with the comparatively slow evolution of the current generation of browsers (such as Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari and Opera). Despite a steady flow of new releases and features, these browsers have not kept up with Google's rising goals for Web applications, including offline processing.

- The common browser limitation of using interpreted JavaScript engines, rather than native code compilation. Current Web applications like Gmail have increased their use of client-side JavaScript by a factor of 10 or 100 when compared to the average Web page created 10 years ago.

We believe Google's objectives for Google Chrome include:

- Creating a browser platform that Google controls directly, rather than indirectly, as with Firefox.

- Offering a showcase for Google applications, such as Gmail and Docs, that stretch the limits of the current generation of browsers.
Enabling the next generation of browser applications, which can work offline and blur the desktop/Web boundary.

Adding Google-style tweaks and innovations to the browser user experience, such as the "Omnibox," which echoes the single text entry box used in Google search and Google Maps.

To achieve these goals, Google implemented several technical advances, including:

- A high-performance JavaScript language engine that approximates native code speeds.
- A new style of user interface.
- Sophisticated system management and process monitoring features that cross into operating system territory.

In the short term, Google Chrome’s success will be measured by how well it enables a compelling user experience for JavaScript-intensive Web applications, such as Gmail. Over the long term, Google Chrome’s appeal must extend beyond early adopters to mainstream enterprise users — a chasm that Firefox has yet to cross.

The industry impact of Google Chrome will include:

- Reduced usage of Firefox. Over the long term, cross-pollination of code between Google Chrome and Firefox is possible because both are based on open-source code.
- Reduced interest in non-Ajax rich Internet application technologies and platforms, such as Adobe Flex and Microsoft Silverlight.
- Benefits to users from increased innovation by rival browser development teams in response to Google Chrome.
- Heightened developer interest in JavaScript for Web applications.
- A more solid market presence for the WebKit rendering engine used by Google, Apple and Adobe.
- A long-term escalation of the strategic conflict between Google and Microsoft if Google Chrome reduces Internet Explorer’s market share and some usage of Microsoft Office and Exchange shifts over to Google-branded, cloud-based alternatives.

**Recommendations**

**Enterprises:**

- If you are a heavy user of Gmail and other JavaScript-intensive applications, evaluate Google Chrome for its performance benefits.
If you generally use regular Web applications and Web sites, the early-stage offering of Google Chrome will be of comparatively less interest to you. Watch for further improvements in later versions.

**Browser vendors and development teams:**

- Rethink your product road map, feature lists and technology foundation, and plan to incorporate offline support.

**Web application developers:**

- If you use client-side JavaScript for future projects, expect significantly improved JavaScript support from all browsers.

**Recommended Reading**

- "The State of Google Apps" — Gartner explores the business model behind Google Apps and the usage model with which it is entering enterprise operating environments. By Tom Austin and others

- "Don’t Wait for IE8 to Move From IE6" — IE8 represented an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, improvement over its predecessor, but its longstanding accumulation of dependencies will make it difficult for enterprises to switch over to an alternative browser. By Ray Valdes

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

Corporate Headquarters
56 Top Gallant Road
Stamford, CT 06902-7700
USA
+1 203 964 0096

Regional Headquarters
AUSTRALIA
BRAZIL
JAPAN
UNITED KINGDOM

For a complete list of worldwide locations, visit http://www.gartner.com/technology/about.jsp

© 2008 Gartner, Inc. and/or its affiliates. All rights reserved. Gartner is a registered trademark of Gartner, Inc. or its affiliates. This publication may not be reproduced or distributed in any form without Gartner’s prior written permission. If you are authorized to access this publication, your use of it is subject to the Usage Guidelines for Gartner Services posted on gartner.com. The information contained in this publication has been obtained from sources believed to be reliable. Gartner disclaims all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information and shall have no liability for errors, omissions or inadequacies in such information. This publication consists of the opinions of Gartner’s research organization and should not be construed as statements of fact. The opinions expressed herein are subject to change without notice. Although Gartner research may include a discussion of related legal issues, Gartner does not provide legal advice or services and its research should not be construed or used as such. Gartner is a public company, and its shareholders may include firms and funds that have financial interests in entities covered in Gartner research. Gartner’s Board of Directors may include senior managers of these firms or funds. Gartner research is produced independently by its research organization without input or influence from these firms, funds or their managers. For further information on the independence and integrity of Gartner research, see “Guiding Principles on Independence and Objectivity.”