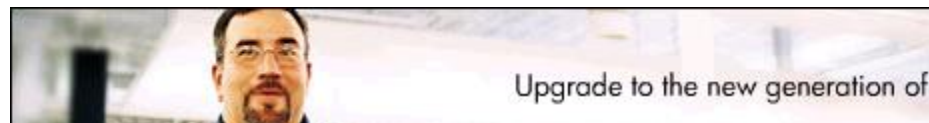




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NEWS



Microsoft developing PC tablet device

By Bob Trott and Dan Neel
March 17, 2000 1:01 pm PT

MICROSOFT IS tackling the sticky issue of combining the functionality of several devices -- pagers, [laptops](#), cell phones, and PDAs (personal digital assistants) -- into one unit.

This week, Microsoft President and CEO Steve Ballmer outlined the device, a PC tablet prototype that company officials stress is in the development stages and at least two years away from fruition. It would include the functions of a two-way pager, PDA, and [notebook](#).

A developer with close ties to Microsoft said researchers also are wrestling with telephony issues, with the end result being the "everyday Internet" vision of Microsoft Chairman and Chief Architect Bill Gates.

"Microsoft's strategy here is to provide a platform for secure, reliable, and globally available Office, Web, and instant [messaging](#) services, that also include data, video, and voice [conferencing](#)," said the developer, who requested anonymity.

"They're working with [wireless](#) device manufacturers on a type of portable

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phone, pager, Web, e-mail, scanner, fax device -- not cell, from what I hear, but some other technology -- that will run [Windows CE](#)," the developer said.

Two former Xerox Parc officials, Butler Lampson and Chuck Thacker, are heading the development along with Dick Brass, Microsoft's vice president of technology development.

But industry observers point out that Microsoft faces hurdles in its attempt, including form-factor issues that will determine customer acceptance of the finished product.

"The form factor for one of these all-in-one devices will have to be a little bigger than any of the single components, at least at first, mostly because of the screen size," said Tim Scannell, an analyst at Mobile Insights in Mountain View, Calif.

"Many companies work through Web portals, which don't function that well with a small screen. Communication is just one piece of the puzzle. Reformatting the data to accommodate screen size will probably have to occur both on the [server](#) side as well as on the client side," Scannell said.

"If Microsoft can't fit this device into the pocket, then they're still working the PC market, which doesn't step on us. Instead what it does is cannibalize the [notebook](#) market," said Michael Mace, chief competitive officer at Palm Computing, in Santa Clara, Calif.

"Being in the middle of two product categories is not a place you want to be," warned Mace, who recalls the failure of the Apple Newton. "A small size here is vital, or Microsoft will be in trouble."

At Microsoft, the PC tablet process likely will be similar to that of the Pocket PC, a representative said. Rather than manufacture the devices, Microsoft developers built prototypes and urged companies such as Casio, Compaq, and Hewlett-Packard to build them.

"Microsoft can try, but you're probably not going to find one device that customers will say suits all their needs," said Tamara Kanoc, marketing director at NetTech Systems, a [mobile](#) systems software developer, in Princeton, N.J.

Microsoft Corp., in Redmond, Wash., is at www.microsoft.com.

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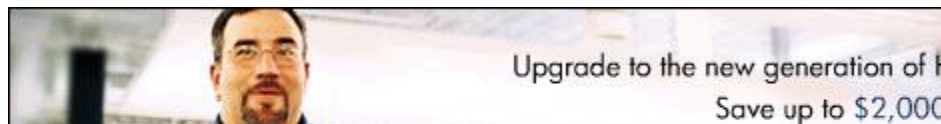
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