Broadband outreach to drive growth

Microsoft top official says

NAFID IMRAN AHMED

A Microsoft top official has linked the overall growth of a country with its IT infrastructure related to broadband penetration, and how new devices are used there.

Right broadband penetration will also help drive the GDP and per capita income, said Emilio Umeoka, the outgoing Asia Pacific president of the global software giant.

"Penetration of mobile phone is fairly big, which is close to 60 million, but if you look at the overall PC shipments at present, it is around 300,000 units, which is very small compared to the size of the population," he said.

There might be a trend to move from phones to PC or other forms in terms of access to technology.

Microsoft will also pair up with the government of Bangladesh to work in the education sector of the country, he said.

"One of the areas that is being discussed is education," Umeoka said.

Umeoka sat with The Daily Star recently, as he came to Dhaka on a short visit and shared how Microsoft can drive a more technologically savvy group of students, how to prepare them for the future needs and how to scale up growth.

"These all can certainly lead to a more vibrant IT economy."

Microsoft is working with the government to provide the right tools, creating the right solutions for the students from the grade 12 up to the university level.

It also provides some of the worldwide programmes such as Microsoft DreamSpark, a programme where technical university students can have access to the development tools for free during their college period.

And if they want to launch a company, there is another programme -- BizSpark, he said.

Emilio Umeoka

BizSpark offers the Microsoft programmes free for the first three years so that the students can use it and create jobs. "So education is the first pillar."

He also talked about how Microsoft can support the government on the e-governance initiatives, how to increase transparency in procurement and document handling or information related to natural disaster. "I think there are several fronts where Microsoft and its partners can contribute to these factors," Umeoka said.

Another concern of Umeoka was that Bangladesh continues to be a very high piracy-rate country and he believes that there should be a balance between access to technology, purchase power parity and new business models.

Awareness should be created on intellectual property (IP), which is relevant in terms of the growth of the country.

"It will be very hard for Bangladesh to create an IT strong economy if it doesn't sustain with IP. Then companies from here will not be able to export technology, and one key component is Digital Bangladesh," he said.

While talking about the new products that will come next year, he mentioned Office 365 that combines the popular Office desktop suite with cloud-based versions of Microsoft's Office, Outlook, Sharepoint, and Lync applications.

"If you don't have enough broadband, the quality of these services will not be very good," said.

"We have had several discussions in the last couple of days with possible partners that can be delivering Microsoft cloud services locally. Because in some countries you have the necessity of having some of the information staying within the country. So local partners will be the key component of the cloud distribution system."

About the new Windows Phone, he said, at present it is going through the localisation priority process. "Now we have availability mostly in English in most countries."

He also said, Windows 7 has been a key success. "One year into the launch, selling of 240 million units is a great success. Windows Phone has also put us back in the game of smartphones where we started long time ago. Social connectivity with Facebook and Twitter brings the experience to a different level," he said.

Bangladesh is a very vibrant market with a population of almost 160 million, and mobile is well developed here, Umeoka.

"Key opportunities that we see are how we can take IT to the other levels and other devices as well. So hopefully the broadband penetration will increase, and we are certainly here for the long run and hopefully we'll make progress as much as Bangladesh will make."

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Finder Ultimate

App that eases life

ADIL MAHMOOD

Anis went to attend a Christmas party in Gulshan. But unlike others, he felt he wasn't enjoying the occasion. Rather than becoming a party pooper, he left the place and before returning home in Dhanmondi, he decided to spend some quality time with his friends. But for that, he had to call a number of people to know their whereabouts at that moment.

Understanding how much talk time would be wasted for this simple purpose, Shiblee Imtiaz Hasan, a computer science student of Brac University developed an application to make life easier. The application "Finder Ultimate" has been designed to provide users with physical location of others such as finding friends in a map and connecting with them.

Not only people, it also helps finding places of interest and business nearby; news, alerts, events and buying offers in neighborhood; live chat and play multiplayer games with other users nearby.

It doesn't end there; the app satisfies its users with stock update and personal data management and business information needs as well.

Such flexibility has been made possible by the multiplatform support of the application. The whole community will be connected to the system via internet and by simply using text-messaging system.

There is a graphically rich web application for desktop users as well for those who want to take advantage of the large displays.

The application has been developed mainly for the low-end phones, which cover a large portion of mobile phone users in Bangladesh.

As Shiblee says, "A location based application was unimaginable for a low-end mobile device even a few months ago. To get a user's location, one would have to rely on a phone's GPS (Global Positioning System) app, which is only available in expensive handsets. This was the reason why there were no commercial applications available in Bangladesh which is based on a user's geographical location."

Shiblee's innovation didn't go in vain as it clinched the first runner-up position in n the recently held 'Aloashbei Mobile Application Development Contest 2010'.

Asked how the application works, Shiblee said it requires a mobile phone operator's server and their physical networking system.
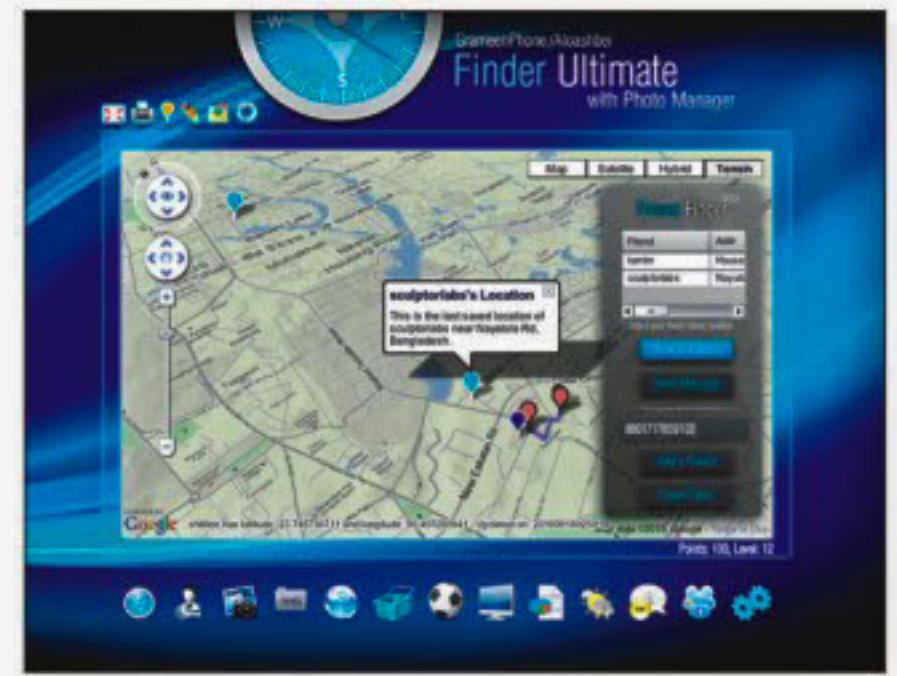
"Every mobile phone gets its signal from a triangulate zone, created by three physical networking towers around its location. And with these, latitude and longitude numbers of any specific mobile phone get recorded in that operator's server. When initiated, my app just synchronises with the latitude and longitude numbers, analyses it and gives an ultimate result of the location, just like Google Maps", said Shiblee.

The developer also said the application provides unsurpassed location based features to all classes and ages of users who want to take advantage of information technology. From a high school student who loves to chat and be at the top of the game leaderboard; to a busy business owner who constantly needs updates on stock updates by texts or needs tasks to be notified; or even a university student who needs to post classified ads for tutoring as well.

"Even Facebook and Twitter have not been overlooked; and users will be able update their tweets or Facebook status with their own geographical location simply by sending a text." Shiblee added.

About his future plan, the Brac University undergraduate student said he plans to pursue PhD degree in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and to develop new technologies for the industry which will enhance the user experience in handheld devices, operating systems, web/software solutions.

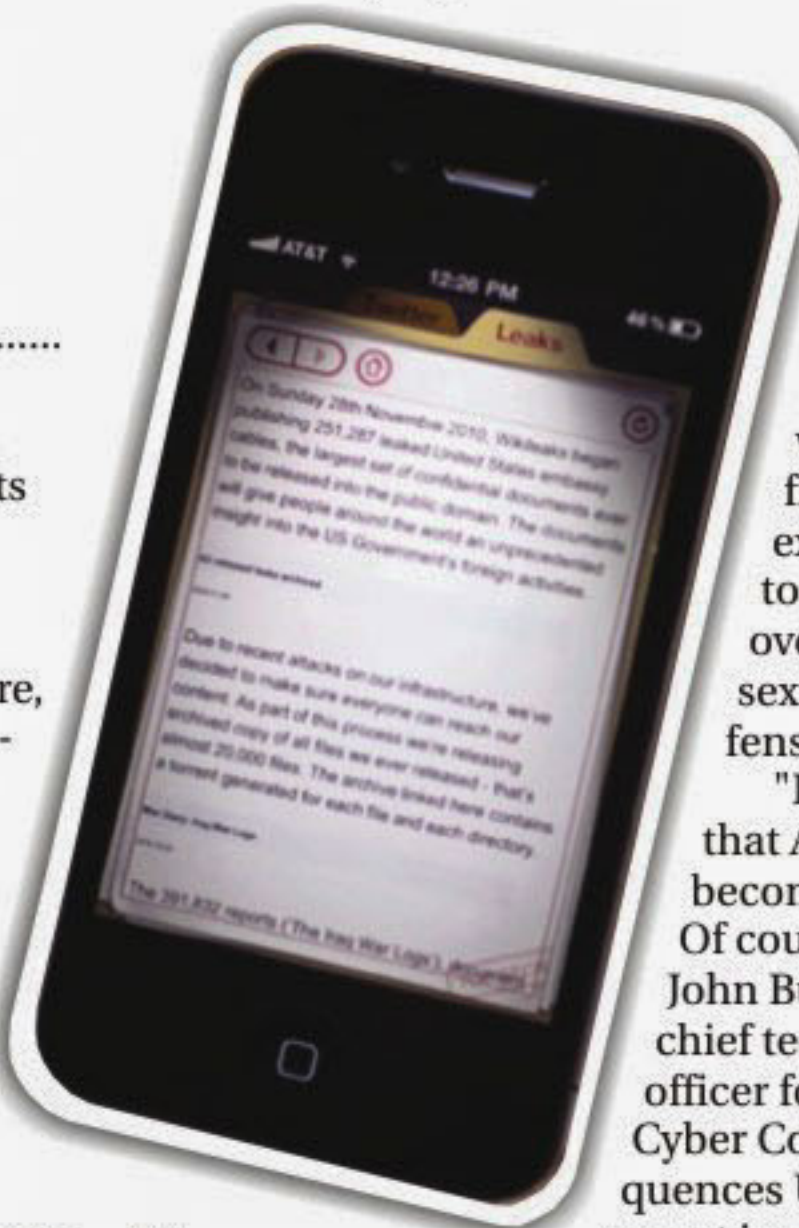# Apple drops WikiLeaks app, Google keeps it

REUTERS, Boston

Apple Inc has joined a growing number of U.S. companies that have severed ties with WikiLeaks, removing an application from its online store that gave users access to the controversial website's content.

But Google Inc, which operates the second-largest online mobile applications store, has kept more than half a dozen apps available on its Android Marketplace that make it easier to access the confidential U.S. government documents WikiLeaks had released on its site.

The two distinct approaches highlight how it is far tougher for developers to get on the iPhone's platform than Android's. Some of the Android programs provide direct access to the WikiLeaks cables, and one of them even alerts users whenever a new leaked document from the WikiLeaks repository is made public.

In past weeks, a host of companies from Amazon.com Inc to Bank of America has withdrawn services for WikiLeaks, which has outraged U.S. authorities by releasing thousands of confidential State Department cables.

But in a backlash against organizations that have cut off the site, cyberactivists have taken to targeting companies -- such as Visa Inc -- seen as foes of WikiLeaks. The website's founder, Julian Assange, was released on bail last week from a jail in Britain, where he is fighting extradition to Sweden over alleged sexual offenses.

"Is it likely that Apple could become a target? Of course," said John Bumgarner, chief technology officer for the U.S. Cyber Consequences Unit, and expert in such attacks. "Anyone that distances themselves from WikiLeaks could potentially become a cyber target."

The WikiLeaks App, created by developer Igor Barinov and offered for $1.99, was only available in Apple's App Store for a few days before it was removed.

"We removed the WikiLeaks App from the App Store because it violated our developer guidelines," Apple said in a statement on Wednesday. "Apps must comply with all local laws and may not put an individual or targeted group in harm's way."

Asus brings new notebook and motherboard

IT.TELECOM DESK

Asus, a leading computer manufacturer, has introduced its latest notebook and motherboard in the local market, said a press release.

ASUS B43F-460M business notebook

Asus' latest B series ASUS B43F-460M business notebook is powered by Intel Core i5-460M 2.66GHz processor, 2GB of DDR3 RAM, 320GB hard drive with Super-Multi DL optical disk drive.

It has 14 inch HD LED widescreen display and built-in Bluetooth and Intel HD Graphics processor. It also includes other features like 802.11 b/g/n Wi-Fi connectivity, 2.0MP Webcam and also pre-install Windows 7 Professional (64 bit) OS.

The B Series comes with Boston-Power's Sonata batteries with a three year warranty.

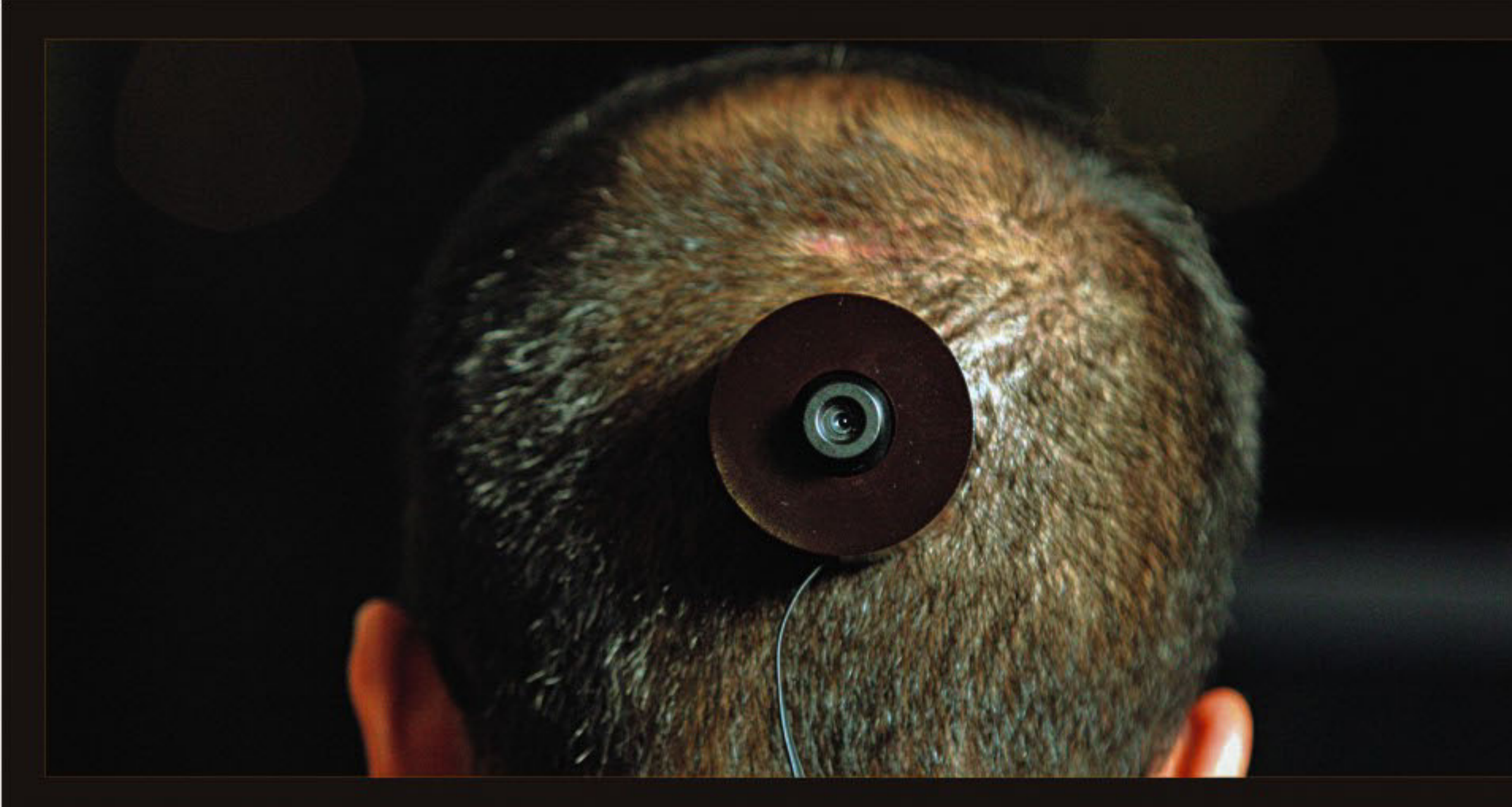The notebook has price tag of Tk 68,000.

P7H55-M LX motherboard

Asus also introduced P7H55-M LX motherboard that supports the latest Intel Lynnfield and Clarkdale processors in LGA1156 package, which has memory and PCI Express controller integrated to support 2-channel (4 DIMMs) DDR3 memory and 16 PCI Express 2.0 lanes providing higher graphics performance.

It also provides separate 3D, 2D and Video Engines to execute different graphic controls in hardware.

Featuring exclusive Anti Surge protection, this board delivers a superior stability experience.

The motherboard has a price tag of Tk 6,300.

Microsoft plans new Windows for tablets

REUTERS, Los Angeles

Microsoft Corp is working on a version of its core Windows operating system for devices such as tablets, according to media reports on Tuesday, and the company said its Windows Phone 7 software is making headway in the booming smartphone market.

Microsoft plans to unveil a version of its operating software that runs for the first time on processors designed by UK-based ARM Holdings PLC, the Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg reported. ARM's processors dominate the tablet and handheld device market.

Microsoft intends to announce a version of its operating system to run on ARM chip architecture, which competes with the "x86" designs favored by Intel, the Wall Street Journal cited people familiar with the plans as saying.

It was unclear when such an operating system might come to market, but the U.S. software maker could claim lost ground in tablets and other battery-powered mobile devices by forging a new partnership with ARM.

Microsoft and ARM declined to comment.

Microsoft said on Tuesday that more than 1.5 million cellphones carrying Windows Phone 7 operating software have sold in the first six weeks of launch, meeting what the company called "realistic" expectations.

Windows Phone 7 may be Microsoft's last chance to establish a major presence in a hot cellphone market now dominated by Apple Inc and Google Inc, analysts say.

The sales numbers were disclosed for the first time by Achim Berg, vice president of business and marketing for Windows phones, in an internally conducted interview posted on Microsoft's website.

"It's a decent number. The mobile market is going to be a battle for Microsoft," said Colin Gillis, an analyst with BGC Partners who has a "buy" rating on Microsoft.

Microsoft's disappearance from the phone market and its delayed response to tablet devices like Apple's iPad has been seen as a drag on shares this year.

TECHPHOTO

The 3rd I

NYU photography professor Wafaa Bilal displays the digital camera mount, which he has had implanted in the back of his head as part of a year-long art project. The project, "The 3rd I", is based on the idea of capturing things subjectively, without the interference of a viewfinder. For the next year, images from the camera will be streamed over the internet and at a museum in Qatar which commissioned this project.

PHOTO: REUTERS