



Windows 8 Worth the wait, but is it too late?

JOHN C ABELL

The release of Windows 8 is now in the home stretch, and the vast majority of the world's computers are about to begin getting the digital equivalent of a complete makeover.

The newest form of Windows which, despite all the attention Apple gets, still operates more than 90 percent of computers has a couple of things going for it. It supposedly will run anything that runs on Windows 7 so there won't be that awful, elongated period when software is suddenly no longer compatible with your machine.

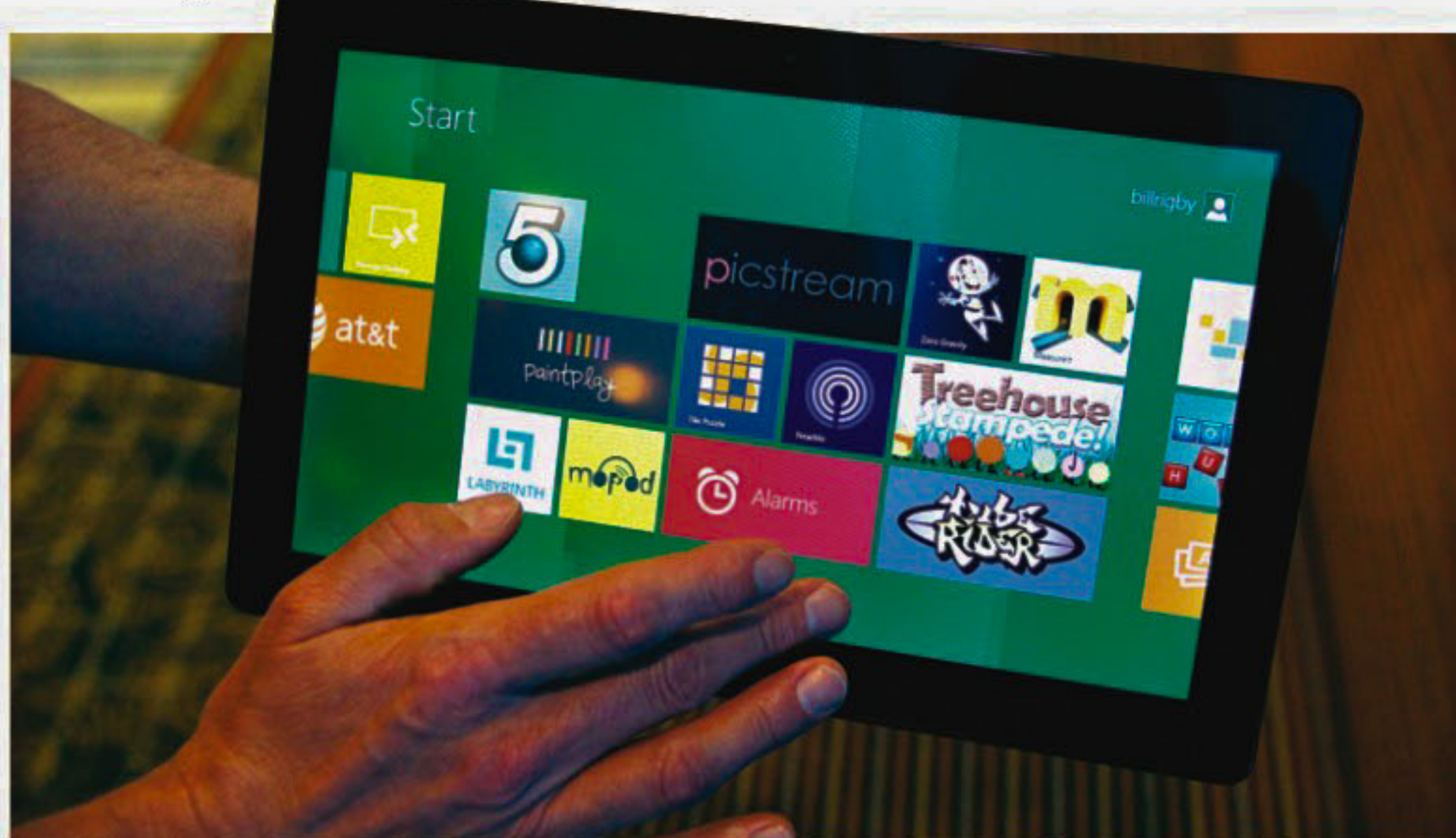
More importantly, Windows 8 borrows heavily from the relatively new user interface metaphors for tablets, which will make it much more palatable for tablet makers to offer Microsoft what could be a third strong contender (along with Apple's iOS and Google's Android) on this surging device vertical.

If there is a heaven, this version of Windows will no longer be what has been seen by many as cavalier attempts to force a bad variation of full-blown Windows on mobile devices, tablets and smartphones. Instead, Microsoft seems to be walking away from the Golden Goose that has been its OS strategy. In a way, there is no clearer acknowledgement of the direction the computing world is going.

It's sort of make or break for Microsoft in a long-term sense. The company that first touted the tablet as the wave of the 21st Century but couldn't close the deal is now going all-in based on momentum which eluded them a few short years ago but was brilliantly exploited by Apple.

Microsoft is a sort of widows and orphans company in tech: They pay a dividend, take in lots of money from software sales, leases and support, and have an overwhelming lead in the installed base sweepstakes. But in the hearts and minds of the self-anointed technorati, Microsoft has not been synonymous with cool for a long time.

For a while that didn't really matter. When you print money and are a virtual monopoly, it's almost better not to be on the tip of anyone's



tongue (especially government regulators) and be a grudging favorite of IT departments and people for whom cost is the main consideration, given the Apple cost premium for traditional computers. For a long time, the only credible competitor was Apple, a gnat in terms of market share (even now in the traditional space) and prospects (back in 1997, when Microsoft helped to bail its competitor out).

This isn't like the time this sleeping giant decided to wake up to the Internet revolution, finally take Netscape and AOL seriously, and start a war which pushed aside upstarts and extended their dominance in the browser space they had largely ignored. There is a mobile Internet revolution going on, Apple is setting the agenda, and there are a thousand small players who could change the game at any time.

We will only know when the PC era has ended in retrospect. It won't just be when other kinds of computers outsell laptops and desktops it will be when college students, grandmas, road warriors and cubicle slaves use one only when they are forced to a public library or some Internet cafe in a Middle Eastern backwater village.

We aren't there yet, because tablets don't do everything we need to do, and we don't think of them as complete replacements. I am writing this on an iPad, and have used one since before they were available to the public, but even I can't do everything my computing life requires on it. I reach for my iPhone to do many things some that even a tablet seems clumsily inappropriate for. And if I have to do a lot of things, quickly, and use a keyboard a lot, and read a lot, I still go to a "real" computer.

The thing is, I can see the writing on the wall, and so can Microsoft. Until now, its mobile strategy hasn't resonated nearly enough, arguably because the need to support the cash cow that is Windows has imposed design parameters for mobile operating software that objectively makes no sense. With Windows 8, Microsoft is taking a leap not of faith, but with its core strategy.

It's the right and only call to make. The question is, will there be any room for error, and yet another re-boot with a future (horrors) Windows 9?

The author writes for Reuters.

Boeing chooses Android to power in-flight entertainment

With Qantas earlier in the week announcing it would be trialing Wi-Fi connected iPads on aircraft for its in-flight entertainment service, it seemed as if the death knell was being sounded for seat-back screens. Seems like the actual people who build the planes have different ideas though.

Boeing, makers of the brand new 787 Dreamliner passenger aircraft, has said it will be going with Google's Android operating system to power in-flight entertainment services via seat-back screens.

According to an Australian Business Traveler report (via Cnet), the technical manager at Boeing's Dreamliner Gallery, Mark Larson, said that Android-based servers are being fitted to all 787s currently being manufactured, with Panasonic providing 787-certified Android touchscreens. However, Larson added that "a lot of the

larger screens (for business and first class passengers) will be non-touch because you can't reach them, although they've also got a prototype of gesturing." In others words, passengers whose screens are too far away will be able to make choices with their



in-flight entertainment through a series of simple hand gestures.

The ABT report says that the touchscreen panels being fitted on Dreamliner planes will be wider than what we're used to seeing on other

aircraft, ranging in size from 7 inches to 17 inches. They'll also be less reflective of ambient light.

With other Boeing aircraft, airlines have quite a lot of say over the type of in-flight entertainment system that's installed. With the Dreamliner, however, Seattle-based Boeing is keen to reduce production costs and so is only offering a limited choice to buyers of the new plane, for which around 820 firm orders have so far been placed.

Should the Android-powered in-flight entertainment program on the soon-to-be-flying Dreamliner planes not be to your liking, you'll be pleased to know that all seats will also be fitted with laptop sockets and USB ports. Or you could even try reading a book made from paper.

Digital Trends

Angry Birds to swoop on Formula One track

REUTERS, Helsinki

Angry Birds will migrate from cellphone screens to the Formula One racetrack this weekend in Singapore, as the firm behind the mobile gaming sensation rolls out a crowd game to be played by live audiences.

Gaming firm Rovio has teamed up with Singapore Telecommunications for the Singapore launch, having created the crowd game with Finnish startup Uplause Ltd, the creators of the world's first live event gaming platform.

"We think this new form of gaming will give fans a great opportunity to form a strong emotional connection with the characters," Rovio's marketing chief Peter Vesterbacka said in a statement.

Unlike most mobile-game crazes, Angry Birds -- in which players use a slingshot to attack the pigs who stole the birds' eggs -- has stayed at the top of the charts.

In the crowd game, viewers control the



slingshot on jumboscreens with their voices.

After Singapore, Rovio and Uplause plan to take the new gaming experience to the biggest live events in the world -- to sports stadiums and rock concerts.

The gaming company is expanding the brand across traditional merchandising, to things such as toys and baby products, and is talking to film studios about taking the birds to the big screen.

Augere partners with Huawei to expand its service

IT.TELECOM DESK

Augere Wireless Broadband Bangladesh, a leading WiMax service provider and the parent company of Qubee, recently signed a network expansion frame contract with Huawei, a leading global information and communications technology (ICT) solutions provider, to further expand its Qubee branded wireless broadband service in Bangladesh, says a press release.

Under the agreement, Augere Bangladesh will deploy WiMAX base transceiver stations (BTS) across Bangladesh using SingleRAN solutions. The

SingleRAN WiMAX solution features a co-platform of hardware and software, software upgrading, and parallel transmitting, able to support dual modes of WiMAX and LTE TDD at the same time.

Upon deployment, Augere can flexibly deploy multi-mode networks according to different scenarios to meet the trends of evolution and convergence, thus effectively reduce the multi-technology deployment risk and protect operators' investments.

Jerry Mobbs, Augere Bangladesh CEO said "This contract is great news not only for Augere and Huawei but also the people of Bangladesh."

Google+ opens up, takes fight to Facebook

REUTERS

Google Inc and Facebook trotted out a variety of new social networking features in back-to-back announcements on Tuesday, underscoring their intensifying competition for Web surfers.

Google integrated its flagship search engine into its 3-month old social network -- with membership now open to the Internet public -- and expanded its "Hangouts" video-chat feature to allow mobile use and broadcasting.

The company said on its official blog its well-received Hangouts feature -- where up to nine people can link up and chat with a user on video -- will be available on camera equipped smartphones powered by its own Android software. Support for Apple Inc iOS devices "is coming soon", it added.

And a user can now host an online broadcast with this feature -- recording a session and broadcasting it live for public access online. Black Eyed Peas front man will.i.am will host the first "Hangout on Air" on Wednesday, Google said.

"Hangouts should keep pace with how you socialize in the real-world, so today we're launching it on the one device that's always by your side: your



mobile phone," senior vice president of engineering Vic Gundotra said on the blog post.

For its part, Facebook said it was introducing a new "ticker" on its users' home pages, providing real-time notifications of what friends are doing on the service. Facebook also revamped the service's main news feed to flag important items -- such as a new baby announcement -- for

Facebook users who have not logged on for a few days. Facebook also changed the way photos are displayed on the site, increasing the size of pictures that appear in a users' news feed.

Facebook is the world's No.1 social networking service, with more than 750 million users. The company has rolled out a series of improvements to its service recently, many of which seem designed to match features Google has used to set apart its rival social networking service, Google+.



Google did not say how many people had signed up for Google+ so far, but confirmed the social network was now open to all, whereas previously it had been invitation-only. Analysts estimate upward of 25 million users have joined Google+ since its inception.

The company also made its search engine available from within the social network. Users can search from Google+ and get results not just on the network, but from the worldwide Internet.

Google's infant social network, which counts Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg as a member, has met skepticism so far. Some are waiting to see if it can maintain the rapid momentum of its first months.

If CEO Larry Page's brainchild -- which some say mimics better than Facebook the instinctive categorizing of friends that occurs in real life -- takes off, it will come at a pivotal moment for its bigger rival. Facebook is widely expected to go public in 2012.

"We're nowhere near done, but with the improvements we've made so far we're ready to move from field trial to beta," Gundotra said.

Nikon unveils first mirrorless cameras

REUTERS, Tokyo

Nikon unveiled its first mirrorless cameras on Wednesday, beating its arch rival Canon to the nascent market for small, interchangeable-lens cameras, where other manufacturers have met with mixed success.

Priced at around 70,000 yen (\$915) and 105,000 yen, the long-rumored Nikon 1 J1 and Nikon 1 V1 will go on sale on October 20, the company said at a launch at an upmarket hotel in Tokyo's Roppongi, with models, actors and Japanese TV star Takuya Kimura on hand.

"A new market is developing among people who feel a compact camera is not quite good enough," Yasuyuki Okamoto, head of the company's imaging division, told reporters, adding that he saw the camera's small size as one of its main appeals.

Nikon and Canon dominate the market for the hefty single-lens reflex cameras used by professional photographers and enthusiasts, and mirrorless cameras pack many of the benefits of those high-end models into smaller bodies.

They have large sensors, giving good picture quality, but no optical viewfinders, enabling manufacturers to keep the camera body smaller and lighter by leaving the mirror out of the structure.

The new format is popular in Japan, where consumers tend to value easily portable products, but has so far sold less well in North America and Europe.

Mirrorless cameras accounted for 31 percent of all interchangeable lens models sold in Japan in 2010, but only 10 percent in the United States, according to research firm IDC.



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