

Wintel PCs target speed, graphics

By April Jacobs

PARTNERS Microsoft Corp. and Intel Corp. last week raised the curtain on design guidelines for next year's PCs. They include a minimum 200-MHz Pentium processor and support for new technologies such as graphics-enabling MMX, quick turn-on capability and Universal Serial Bus (USB).

But the PC98 Design Guide is still in the planning stages, according to Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft, which is still awaiting feedback from hardware makers such as Dell Computer Corp. in Round Rock, Texas, and Compaq Computer Corp. in Houston.

The only proposal that drew any real fire is the guideline's call to drop support for the Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, which supports such

Guidelines for a standard PC being proposed by Microsoft and Intel include the following:

- 200-MHz Pentium processor with MMX technology
- 32M bytes of RAM
- Support for at least one Universal Serial Bus port
- Hardware support for the OnNow initiative

peripherals as modems and network interface cards, in favor of Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI).

Support for PCI would let Microsoft and Intel provide better tools for initiatives such as Plug and Play, which in turn would benefit users,

the companies said.

"Intel and Microsoft are floating this thing out there, and they would like it to disappear, but the reality is that the installed base of ISA machines is huge and not something that you can make go away that quickly," said a spokesperson for one top-tier PC maker, who requested anonymity.

"The transition is going to be painful," said another, who also requested anonymity. He said users want to keep support for ISA because they don't want to have to buy new network interface cards and modems and fear that support for other bus technologies such as PCI and USB isn't mature enough to warrant such a transition.

End users also said they have doubts about the marketplace being ready for such a transition.

"It will probably be another

four or five years before people are really ready to give up ISA," said Matthew Merrick, vice president of information systems at the Merrick Printing Co. in Louisville, Ky.

End users will want to make sure they have enough choices for newer technologies that support PCI before moving to it, he said.

STIFF GUIDELINES

Analysts said that although guidelines that call for 200-MHz processors are a bit much, companies may not be getting such a bad deal for the price. Most observers predicted that system pricing would be similar to what users now pay for a 133- or 166-MHz desktop.

The vast majority of large corporate users still run 16-bit operating systems such as Windows 3.1 and Windows 3.11, so there is no great need for 200-MHz speeds yet, said Chris LeTocq, an analyst at Dataquest in San Jose, Calif. □

Microsoft gives Windows 95 users cost-cutting tool

By April Jacobs

REVERSING AN earlier stance, Microsoft Corp. officials said they will provide Windows 95 users with a Zero Administration for Windows tool kit designed to lower desktop administration costs.

The tool kit will be available within 90 days.

Windows users have been saying for months they would like to see the tools, which are supposed to automate tasks such as software distribution and upgrades while also providing more centralized administration.

ZERO HEROES

Zero Administration Kit for Windows will include the following:

- Central management software
- Limited lockdown features to prevent users from altering settings
- Automated software distribution and updates

"There are places where these tools can be of use to us, because they will allow us to spend less time doing repetitive tasks," said Frank Delargy, senior information systems manager at Waltham, Mass.-based Polaroid Corp.

His company is migrating about 5,000 users from Windows 3.1 to a mixture of Windows 95 and Windows NT-based desktops.

Even so, Microsoft officials several weeks ago said they planned to limit tool kit support to Memphis, the company's next version of Windows 95, and Windows NT 5.0.

Microsoft also committed to an add-on tool kit for Windows NT 4.0, which it said it will deliver within the next two months.

Although Microsoft officials said customer demand drove them to release a Windows 95 version of the tool kit, analysts said they suspect the company's decision was fueled by the fact that it will be late shipping Memphis and NT 5.0 — possibly as late as the first half of next year. That would mean access to the tool kit would have excluded much of the existing user base. □

Early version of Memphis adds key features, lacks others

REVIEW ► Windows 95's successor

By Chris DeVoney

THE EARLY engineering release of Microsoft Corp.'s Memphis shows a positive direction for this Windows 95 successor, but for the moment, it lacks sufficient features to be a compelling corporate upgrade.

Among the key elements missing from this release, which was pushed into the waiting hands of several thousand developers last week at Microsoft's Windows Hardware Engineering Conference, is integration with Internet Explorer 4.0. That integration is intended to give Memphis users a browser-like feel when working with applications.

Memphis now incorporates features first found in the October OEM 2 release, such as Universal Serial Bus support and the 32-bit File Allocation Table (FAT32).

The prerelease also adds support for emerging hardware and industry initiatives, such as IEEE 1394 (Apple Computer, Inc.'s Firewire), Intel Corp.'s Accelerated Graphics Port and Digital Video Disc.

The long-awaited common 32-bit Windows device driver model for Windows 95, Memphis and Windows NT finally

KEY FEATURES OF MEMPHIS

- Integrates with Internet Explorer (not in developer release)
- Includes Win32 Driver Model
- Has FAT32 and FAT32 converter
- Includes Advanced Configuration and Power Interface
- Supports multiple simultaneous displays
- Supports Universal Serial Bus, Firewire (IEEE 1394) and Digital Video Disc
- Has remote access enhancements

appears. That will let developers bring products to market faster and could help Windows NT lose its laggard reputation for using devices such as faxes and scanners.

Along with FAT32, which was designed to make efficient use of 2G-byte and larger disk drives, Memphis adds the converter missing from earlier releases. But the converter offers a "half-loaf," changing FAT16 partitions into FAT32 but not combining separate disk partitions, as seen when converting the two partitions

on a 2.5G-byte drive.

To combine those partitions back into a single 2.5G-byte unit, you would either need to do manual repartition or use a third-party tool.

Memphis supports dual mon-

itors using two video cards on one system. The two displays can combine to make a larger desktop, or programs can display different items on each monitor. For example, a Web designer can do Hypertext Markup Language coding on one display and see the page in a browser on the other display.

Remote access server improvements put Memphis on par with Windows NT 4.0. Our Memphis machine acted as dial-in host for clients that run Novell, Inc.'s IPX and SPX and Microsoft's NetBEUI protocol.

Through multilink channel aggregation, which combines multiple communications links into a single higher-speed link, we used two 56K bit/sec. modems to connect to an NT 4.0 server. The two connections combined into a single 66K bit/sec. upload and more than 100K bit/sec. download connection, offering near-Integrated Services Digital Network speeds over ordinary telephone lines.

The Point-to-Point Tunnel Protocol turns the Internet into a low-cost, secure virtual private network for Memphis and NT users. In our tests, we connected our Memphis machine through a local Internet service provider to our NT server, which was connected to PSInet in Herndon, Va., a national Internet provider.

Other features include the following:

- OnNow support, which lets idle desktops and servers slumber in power-saving modes and "wake" for use instantly without a time-wasting cold boot.

- Automation of repetitive tasks by executing Visual Basic or JavaScript scripts.

- New troubleshooting utilities to collect more accurate information about the machine.

- The Internet System Update, which can download and install new or updated drivers or system files from an update site without user intervention. □

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