Intel's Moblin Accelerates OS Battle for Netbooks

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(NewsFactor.com [1]) - The new and flourishing category of netbooks is also becoming a breeding ground for new computer operating systems. The Google-backed, Linux-based open-source Android mobile platform has been moving into netbooks from smartphones, and on Tuesday Intel announced a new beta version of its Linux-based Moblin operating system for netbooks and other mobile devices.

Moblin 2.0 features a new user interface called M-Zone, or My Zone, which includes ready access to IMs, social networks like Facebook or Twitter, and e-mail, and it features its own media player. The user interface can be customized by hardware makers, meaning that different models could have their own characteristics.

Netbook Market 'Exploding'

Support for Moblin is beginning to build. Novell recently announced its support for the OS, saying it would encourage OEMs to adopt the platform, and China-based IVT announced last month the first Bluetooth 3.0 commercial stack for Moblin.

The huge growth in the netbook category is creating a new front in the suddenly hot operating-system wars. Android is migrating from several smartphone models to netbooks, and Windows 7 is expected to be a big player.

"The netbook market is exploding," said Avi Greengart, an analyst with industry research firm Current Analysis, "and it's definitely to Intel's advantage to move into this as quickly as possible, before the advent of Windows 7."

Moblin could migrate from netbooks to smartphones, the opposite of Android's path. Earlier this month, Intel and Nokia said they had launched an open-source project called oFono to build a mobile telephony stack using Moblin. Nokia's Maemo platform is used on the company's tablet computers.

The Moblin platform is optimized for use on netbooks and other devices using Intel's line of Atom chips. Later this year, Intel is expected to release the newest Atom processor, called Pineview. On Tuesday, the company released some information about the new version, which puts the memory controller and graphics on the same chip, allowing the platform to reduce the total number of chips from three to two and, presumably, reducing costs.

New Netbooks from Acer, Asus, Dell

The news about netbooks is moving at a quick pace, even as the specs keep increasing. Earlier this week, Acer announced two new netbooks -- an 11.6-inch and a 10.1-inch, both in the Aspire One line. The 11.6-inch model, the A0751h, features

1364x768 resolution in a 16x9 format, and the 10.1-inch has 1024x600 resolution. Both have full-sized keyboards, and both are built around Atom chips, with starting prices at $349 and $298, respectively.

Last week, Asus revealed its Eee PC 1008Ha, also known by its easier-to-remember name of Seashell. The Seashell retails for $420, and Dell's recently released Mini 10v goes for $299. Both machines are built around versions of Intel's Atom chip.

Some observers have noted that the category is evolving as quickly as it is growing, in terms of size and resolution of screens, performance, connectivity and other features. Now, with the evolution of Moblin, Android, and Windows, among others, the interface and applications are likely to evolve as well.

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