

Can Windows and Other OSs Play in the Same Sandbox?

by Jill Gilbert

Jill Barson Gilbert, QEP, is president of Lexicon Systems, LLC. E-mail: jbgilbert@lexicon-systems.com.

Last year, my Windows 7 notebook hiccupped as I led a week-long series of workshops. My client asked if I was ready to buy a Windows 8 PC. I replied that, most likely, my next computer would be a Mac. With today's software delivery models, I predicted that moving from Microsoft Windows to the Apple OS X operating system (OS) would have minor impact.

Windows and Apple once were polar opposites, one associated with business and the other with students and creative types. Today, they can coexist in business. While most business networks rely upon Windows servers and software, they can accommodate both Windows and OS X devices. The line in the sand between the two OSs is not as sharp as

it was, largely a result of two market forces:

- 1 The Internet delivers OS-independent software in the form of Software-as-a-Service (SaaS)¹ and Cloud² apps.
- 2 A mobile workforce with ultraportable gadgets demands anywhere, anytime information access.





Even as most business networks rely upon Windows servers and software, they can allow Windows- and OS X-based devices to play nicely in the workplace. Whether IT departments are eager to take on this challenge is another issue.

Internet vs. Traditional Delivery Models

The Internet continues to grow at amazing rates (see sidebar on page 42) and organizations of all sizes can benefit from Internet-delivered software. Customers pay subscription fees to access up-to-date software apps and the vendor performs maintenance and upgrades. Pure SaaS vendors operate a single version of the software, so all customers receive upgrades at the same time; other vendors may host multiple software versions, allowing more flexibility regarding upgrade timing.

In contrast, older, client/server software delivery requires large up-front license fees rather than “pay-as-you-go” subscriptions. Many organizations carefully evaluate whether to perform software upgrades due to long implementation cycles, plus training, and ongoing maintenance expense. Those that skip major upgrades or wait until the software is past its prime deny users the features and benefits

that others experience—possibly to a competitive advantage.

As with other enterprise software, the trend in environment, health, and safety (EH&S) is Internet delivery of full-featured applications. For office tasks, SaaS versions offer fewer features than the desktop versions. However, users that need advanced features can use desktop versions that integrate with the Cloud software. Google and Microsoft offer SaaS versions and Apple is not far behind (iWork Cloud apps were in beta testing as of December 2013).

Mobile, Ultraportable Technology

Employees started the Bring Your Own Technology (BYOT) trend with smartphones and tablets; some want to use the latest notebooks at work—their own or the company’s. The blurred line between OS allows vendors to market three diverse types of computers to businesses, from Ultrabooks to MacBooks to Chromebooks.

Ultrabooks and MacBooks sit at the top and middle of the price spectrum. *Ultrabook* is an Intel designation for thin and light, powerful Windows notebooks with the latest processors and solid state

► Internet Growth Projections



- Global IP traffic increased more than fourfold in the past 5 years, and will increase threefold over the next 5 years.
- Traffic from wireless and mobile devices will exceed traffic from wired devices by 2016.
- Nearly half of all IP traffic will originate with non-PC devices by 2017.

Source: Cisco Visual Networking Index, Forecast and Methodology, 2012–2017, May 29, 2013; www.cisco.com/c/en/us/solutions/collateral/service-provider/ip-ngn-ip-next-generation-network/white_paper_c11-481360.html.

drives (SSD) in place of hard disk drives (HDD). Their fourth-generation “Haswell” processors are fast and responsive, with twice the graphics performance and 50% more battery life than their predecessors.³ A **MacBook** is a thin, light, and fast Apple OS X notebook with a Haswell processor and an SSD,⁴ available in a range of models.

Chromebooks sit at the low end of the price spectrum. A **Chromebook** is a small and fast “thin client” powered by the Google Chrome OS, with limited disk space, aimed at users that access most all their apps and store their data on the Internet.⁵ A variety of vendors produce Ultrabooks and Chromebooks, while only Apple produces MacBooks.

Making the choice

Back to my mission... should I purchase a Windows or Apple notebook? As in any good system selection, first I established needs and selection criteria. Then I evaluated several hardware configurations from different vendors.

An Ultrabook with ample memory and a large SSD would meet my needs. I could use newer versions of familiar software. Surprisingly, an Ultrabook cost more than a MacBook with comparable specs,

partly from the high cost of the SSD. For total cost of ownership, I needed to consider the cost of periodic software and system “crashes” and a moderate amount of ongoing maintenance, and a shorter life.

A MacBook with ample memory and a large SSD would meet most of my needs. I would need alternatives to my Windows flowchart and project management apps. The MacBook Pro had a better display and cost less than the Ultrabook. For total cost of ownership, I needed to consider the cost of a slight learning curve, though would expect fewer software and system “crashes,” little ongoing maintenance, and a longer life.

We are close to the time when the OS no longer matters to knowledge workers and IT professionals. SaaS and Cloud apps accessed on wireless and ultraportable devices let us work unchained from PCs; all we need is a Web browser and a user account.

If your organization embraces BYOT and/or hardware/OS options, then understand how this change will impact your work.⁶ For many, OS choice boils down to personal preference. By the way, I bought a Mac. **em**

References

1. Software-as-a-service (SaaS) or “on-demand software” is a software delivery model with software and associated data hosted in the Cloud. SaaS solutions normally utilize a multi-tenant architecture; the application serves multiple businesses and users, and partitions its data accordingly. See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SaaS>.
2. The Cloud describes a number of computing concepts. In this case, it refers to network-based services that can be scaled up or down on the fly without affecting the end user. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloud_computing.
3. Intel. See www.intel.com/ultrabook.
4. Apple. See www.apple.com/macbook-pro/features-retina.
5. Google. See www.google.com/chromebook.
6. For more information, see Marks, G. *Should I buy a Mac for My Business for 2013*, Forbes.com, December 3, 2013; www.forbes.com/sites/quickerbettech/2012/12/03/should-i-buy-a-mac-for-my-business-in-2013/.

