TOOLS of the TRADE

Sony VAIO® W

The next-to-last shoe has dropped with the announcement of Sony's VAIO® W netbooks. That leaves only Apple still on the sidelines with no mini-notebooks in production or even planned (so they say). The W Series is composed of three portables with standard 10-inch screens and Intel Atom processors like many other netbooks. Technical specs include a high-resolution, 1366 × 768, LED backlit 10.1-inch (measured diagonally), ultra-wide display; an Intel 1.66GHz processor; 1GB of RAM and a 160GB hard drive; Bluetooth and 802.11 b/g WiFi connectivity; built-in webcam and microphone; two USB ports; and Windows XP Home Edition for an operating system. The small portable weighs 2.6 pounds. The keyboard has what Sony calls isolated keys—each key is a separated, raised button. Green features include ENERGY STAR® 5.0 compliance, EPEAT Gold registered, the monitor is mercury-free, the packaging is made of 95% recycled materials, and Sony even has a program that will help you recycle your old PC. The three netbooks in the W series come in decorator colors—berry pink, sugar white, and cocoa brown. With the sale of netbooks expected to double this year, Sony might be a little late getting into this part of the market, but they are now accepting pre-orders on their website at www.sonystyle.com.

The Magellan® Maestro™ 4700 GPS

The Magellan® Maestro™ 4700 GPS navigation device gets part of its name from the large 4.7-inch color touch screen. For those wondering about the speculation on some blogs about the possibility that smart phones will eliminate the GPS market, just take a look at the screen on your iPhone. It's a much smaller 3.5 inches, measured diagonally. In fact, the overall dimensions of the slim 4700 are 3.46" × 5.2" × 0.6". But it isn't just the size of the unit's display. The Maestro features a OneTouch™ Favorites Menu where you can bookmark favorite destinations or searches and find them for any location. Along with maps of the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico, the AAA TourBook Guide is programmed with ratings and descriptions of AAA-approved places to stay, dine, and save in all 50 states. A six-million POI (Points of Interest) database is also built in, and the Voice Command lets you direct the unit by asking it to find, say, the nearest gas station just by asking. Bluetooth compatibility lets you make or receive calls using a compatible cell phone, and the noise-canceling microphone minimizes road noise. With a GPS accuracy of three to five meters, the Find your Car feature will remember the location of your car in parking lots, airports,

malls, universities, amusement parks, or stadiums. In case you need room for more information and/or maps, there's an SD-card compatible slot. Often it makes sense to go with the device that does one thing really well rather than one that's trying to do it all. www.magellangps.com

Bluelounge StudioDesk

The StudioDesk from the Bluelounge design studio offers a clutter-free surface created specifically for laptops. You can surround your computer with peripherals, but the desktop won't fill up with coiling wires. Beneath the center section of the desktop there's a shallow storage area that you get to by sliding the section forward. In the storage area you can put the loose ends of the connecting cables, flash or other external drives, USB hubs, even a MacMini server, and they will disappear when you slide the cover back. There's a long, narrow gap that remains open so wires can be fed into the space below. The overall design is simplified to two elements—the white laminated surface and the darker mahogany legs. A remov-

able faux leather mat covers the sliding portion of the desk. The desk was designed for the most advanced cable management possible, and it succeeds. Overall dimensions are 47" × 27.5" × 29.5" high.
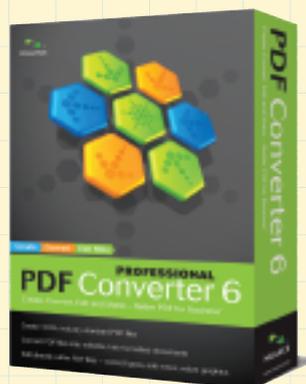
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Nuance Professional PDF Converter 6

The Nuance Professional PDF Converter 6 is one of the most useful business publishing tools available. With it you can create, edit, and share original PDF files as well as convert PDF files into Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents with full format fidelity. You can create PDF port-folios by collecting many files or folders within a single file. But beyond aggregating them in a single PDF publication, you can then unify the presentation by selecting color palettes and embedding a welcome or header graphic. Likewise, you can take larger PDFs and break them down into smaller, e-mailable portions for distribution. New with version 6 is the ability to scan directly to PDF with two clicks. The "auto-detect" feature automatically recognizes

scanned or "image-only" PDF files, and it can make the files searchable with a single click. You can also convert these images to a text-only state, which gives you an editable PDF document. Assembling a large document from many individual documents is accomplished through simple drag-and-drop rearrangements. You can com-pare a PDF document with a Word document side by side, and the program will show you any differences in the versions. You can add 256-bit encryption to secure a document; add and play multimedia Flash content; select just a part of a document to convert into Word, Excel, WordPerfect, or PowerPoint for-mats; batch process PDF files; archive Lotus Notes e-mails as PDFs; and more.

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TECH FORUM

Chrome Wars

By Michael Castelluccio, Editor

LAST MONTH, WHEN GOOGLE ENGINEERS announced they were working on an operating system designed for the Internet, you might have thought the news was going to transform Redmond and Mountain View into armed camps overnight. Headlines on some of the tech blogs were exuberant and incendiary. TechCrunch.com bannered: "Google Drops a Nuclear Bomb on Microsoft—And It's Made of Chrome." *The New York Times* was much more subdued ("In Chrome, Hints of a Real Rival to Windows"), but the correspon-dents Miguel Helft and Ashlee Vance explained, "With the software, Google is mounting a blunt challenge to the dominance of Microsoft, whose Windows operating sys-tem runs about 95% of PCs."

It seems to be a replay of an old story—the OS wars. You might remember the challenge by another tech giant, IBM, with its OS/2 operating system back in the late 1980s. The product was discontinued in 2006 and forgot-ten by most soon thereafter. So what kind of chance will Google have when even IBM failed?

There seem to be a number of differences with this gathering storm. The new operating system, called Chrome OS by Google, isn't being designed for the large metal box under your desk. It's being coded essentially for the Web. It looks like this is going to be an air war. On July 7, the official Google blog announced, "Google Chrome OS is an open source, lightweight operating sys-tem that will initially be targeted at netbooks. We're designing the OS to be fast and lightweight, to start up and get you on the Web in a few seconds." By contrast, the original Windows XP was weighed down with about 35 million lines of code, and the more recent Vista has more than 50 million.

The departure away from the heavy iron we have become accustomed to—the boxes that have to be upgraded with more powerful processors and much larger memory capacities with each new iteration of Windows—sums up Google's attempt to "re-think what operating

systems should be." Today we still use operating systems that were basically designed "in an era when there was no Web."

The Times's reporters note, "With Google's latest effort (Chrome OS), some argue that the right company has hit on the right idea at the right time." One of those agreeing is Mark Shuttleworth, CEO of Canonical, the company that offers a popular version of Linux called Ubuntu. Shuttleworth told the paper, "Google has a reasonable stab at redefining the desktop."

Google has almost 100 products, from photo editing to word processors and spreadsheets, and almost every one of them is offered free.

DE-MONETIZATION

Another quality of this "different OS for a different time" is defined in the phrase "open source." Chrome OS will be a free product, and other developers will be able to alter and customize it. Not an unusual strategy for Google, a company that Chris Anderson, author of the book Free, says is an archetype of the 21st Century De-Monetization Economic Model.

Anderson calls the Googleplex at Google headquarters the "citadel of free." It's the "headquarters of the biggest company in history built on giving things away." He points out that the company has almost 100 products, from photo editing to word processors and spreadsheets, and almost every one of them is offered free. "Really free," he says, "no trick." The company makes so much money from advertising and from a few charge-for-service products, most relating to their search engine, that they can afford to give the rest away. And another overwhelming benefit of this insane business plan is that, at Google, all R&D for new services can begin with questions such as: "Would it be cool?" "Do people want it?" "Does it use our technology well?" They don't begin, as so many others do, with the hamstringing demand: "Will it make money?"

And how is this alien model working out for them? Well, in mid-July the stock reached $442.60 a share, while Microsoft hovered around $24.

ESTABLISHED BASES

If there's going to be a clash, you might expect the side with the overwhelming forces to prevail. That makes sense, and Microsoft not only has an established user base of hundreds of millions, but the fact that developers have been adapting their programs to run on Windows for decades puts them at a serious advantage.

Chrome OS will run on a stripped-down version of the Linux operating system, but even though Linux has been around for a while now, many of the most popular software products don't run on it. Google, it seems, is going to need a worldwide conscription of new users.

Or maybe they won't. The Chrome OS contains the Chrome browser, and the browser is the conduit to the Web and to the Web applications. If it works the way Google envisions it, the number in its forces will be those who use the Internet. And everybody uses the Internet—those who have Windows machines, Macs, Linux boxes, even those few who might have a computer still running OS/2. Now add the devices that run mobile operating systems, and you have little need for a draft. The numbers are there already.

But what will Chrome users be able to do with their lightweight netbooks once they get online? This is where the Cloud revolution comes in. Google already offers quite a selection of free applications that don't have to be downloaded onto your computer to use, including word processing and spreadsheet programs. The Cloud promises more applications and free, as well as rented, storage that can be reached from any computer.

Sundar Pichai, Google's vice president of product management, and Linus Upson, director of engineering, explained in the July announcement, "For application developers, the Web is the platform. All Web-based applications will automatically work, and new applications can be written using your favorite Web technologies." Remember when it was, "The network is the computer?" Now, the Web will become both the computer and the software library for your remote, browser-powered netbook. The Chrome Browser, running on a lean Chrome OS will get you into this Cloud with an almost instant boot-up.

And there's one other possible advantage for the much smaller OS. Google claims that it will be "completely redesigning the underlying security architecture of the OS" in order to eliminate viruses, malware, and bot takeovers. Not a bad secret weapon, if it works. **SF**