

Is Steve Jobs the New Lord of the Rings?



The ability to run multiple operating systems simultaneously on the same machine under one supra-operating system or “hypervisor”—all with touch-of-a-key flexibility—has long been the Holy Grail of the computer industry. Or, to put it in J.R.R. Tolkien’s terminology, “The Ring.” The next release of Mac OS X (Leopard) is that long-sought “Ring” and Steve Jobs is about to become “Lord of the Rings.”

By [Gary Morgenthaler](#)

Posted today at 10:00 AM , September 15, 2006

The amount of time and attention lavished by Steve Jobs at [last month's WWDC](#) on the “[Spaces](#)” feature of the forthcoming Leopard version of OS X begs the question: what’s up? It is deceptively simple, and yet intriguing. Spaces allows users to have separate windows in which a full desktop of related open applications can be displayed.

At WWDC, Jobs demoed four simultaneous “spaces” opened and displayed as tiles on the screen, from which you can select and then drag-and-drop applications between them as required. At first blush, this new feature (thought not so new for hardcore Mac users) struck me as not very practical and rather unimportant. Why would Apple make such a big deal about it? After reflection, however, it occurred to me that Apple just might be up to something pretty revolutionary.



Here's my guess. Apple recently announced "Boot Camp," a utility that allows you to boot up either Apple's OS/X or MS Windows. This is a great feature, but it forces you to choose between OS/X and Windows because booting is slow. A third party vendor also offers a virtualization product called "Parallels" that allows you to run MS Windows on Macintosh hardware running under Mac OS/X. But Leopard's "spaces" feature could allow you to seamlessly switch between Mac OS/X and MS Windows with a single keystroke. Therefore, you could quite easily run both MS Windows applications and Apple OS/X applications on the same hardware at the same time – and just as easily switch back and forth.

Better still, Apple's dual processor architecture featuring Intel's Core 2 Duo architecture, provides four separate processor cores on which to run applications. Therefore, switching between operating systems should be instantaneous because each OS maintains its separate context. By the time Mac OS/X "Leopard" is released in 1Q07, Apple could market machines with dual Intel quad-core processors. That means Apple's Mac Pro could possibly have a total of eight processors, each capable of running a different task and/or a different OS and application.

So, my suspicion is that Steve Jobs' surprise in January will be to run Windows Vista seamlessly in a window (or "space") under Mac OS/X, accessible at the touch of a key. Better still, it should run just as well (or better) as on a traditional PC because nothing is emulated: all code is native and MS Windows will run on its own dedicated processor core. There is no reason why Linux can't be run at the same time in another space and on another core.

This ability to run multiple operating systems simultaneously on the same machine under one supra-operating system or "hypervisor"— all with touch-of-a-key flexibility — has long been the Holy Grail of the computer industry. Or, to put it in J.R.R. Tolkien's terminology, "The Ring." If my speculation is right, Mac OS/X is about to become that long-sought "Ring" and Steve Jobs is about to become "Lord of the Rings":

One Ring to rule them all, One Ring to find them, □ One Ring to bring them all and in the Darkness bind them One OS to rule them all, One OS to find them, □ One OS to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.

Of course, this could prove to be idle speculation but, if correct, it could be game-changing for both Apple Computer and the entire PC industry. With the ability to shift seamlessly and at no additional cost between the operating systems of Apple, Windows, Linux and who knows what else, Apple and its many innovative applications could start to look awfully attractive to corporate purchasers. With one stroke, Apple could end its long exile from mainstream business computing. It may be that much of the enterprise action has shifted to the Web, but the rumors of the desktop's death have been greatly exaggerated.

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