

Microsoft aims at Apple with high-end PCs, 3D software

NEW YORK: Microsoft launched a new consumer offensive on Wednesday, unveiling a high-end computer that challenges the Apple iMac along with an updated Windows operating system that showcases three-dimensional content and "mixed reality".



Targeted at creatives

The US tech giant announced its first desktop computer, called Surface Studio, a \$3,000 high-end "all-in-one" device that aims at creative professionals, a segment dominated by Apple.

"We're creating a new category that transforms your desk into a creative studio," Microsoft chief executive Satya Nadella said at the unveiling in New York.

With a large, 28-inch (71-centimeter) hinged touchscreen display touted as "the thinnest desktop monitor ever created," Surface Studio adds to the Microsoft lineup of tablet and laptop devices for the premium segment.

"It is a new class of device that transforms from a desktop PC into a powerful digital canvas, unlocking a more natural and immersive way to create on the thinnest display ever built," said Microsoft vice president Terry Myerson.

The new PC has an ultra-HD 4.5K display, offering more pixels than most new high-definition televisions. It will be available

in "limited quantities" for the upcoming holiday season, with more units available in 2017.

The new device drew a mixed response from analysts. "Yes, this is very cool. But what's the market for a \$3,000 computer you can draw on? How many people have that job?" asked Benedict Evans of the venture firm Andreessen Horowitz in a tweet.

But Avi Greengart at the research firm Current Analysis said the new Microsoft products "are aimed at setting the high mark for the Windows ecosystem."

Surface Book and Creators update

Microsoft also announced an updated Surface Book – its high-end convertible tablet-computer – which will sell for \$2,400, adding improved graphics and computing power and with an estimated 16 hours of battery life. "It's for the people really pushing performance," Microsoft vice president Panos Panay said.

The Surface devices allow users to create content onscreen with a special pen-stylus, and Microsoft introduced a new disk device called Dial which attaches to the screen and offers additional controls such as viewing the timeline of a creation.



Microsoft meanwhile announced its Windows 10 Creators operating system would be offered as a free update in early

2017, enabling users to create 3D content and delve into virtual and augmented reality. The update offers "new ways to create and play," said Myerson.

The update will allow for a 3D capture application for mobile devices and a new version of the popular program Paint for 3D objects. The system will allow users to add three-dimensional emojis and to create and manipulate content they create or scan.

Microsoft general manager Megan Saunders demonstrated how the capture application can scan a sand castle in three dimensions, and then mix that with other content.

With the new Windows system, users will be able to experience virtual reality with Microsoft's HoloLens headgear and its Edge browser. Edge "will act as the portal to display 3D content on HoloLens," said Saunders.

Microsoft said its hardware partners would be selling Windows-compatible virtual reality gear starting at about \$300. Microsoft is aiming to keep users on Windows as many switch to new mobile devices powered by Apple or Google software.

“ We're partnering with top PC makers to build a range of innovative VR headsets starting at \$299. Coming in 2017.

[#MicrosoftEvent pic.twitter.com/pMnFbJFZe6](https://twitter.com/pMnFbJFZe6)— Windows (@Windows) [October 26, 2016](#) ”

Bringing 3D to the masses

Analyst Patrick Moorhead at Moor Insights & Strategy said the move appears positive for Microsoft.

"I like where Microsoft is going with Creators Update as it reflects PC differentiation and includes elements of what I believe consumers are interested in, albeit hard to execute upon," Moorhead said. The analyst added that "3D creation is difficult today and Microsoft is taking initial steps to bring it to the masses."

With PC sales sputtering, Microsoft has been emphasising its cloud computing and business services but is also working to stay relevant to consumers with Windows and its various computing and gaming devices.

The new version of Windows will help users sift through email and other messages by creating "people" icons that show messages from important connections.

Source: AFP

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