

Intel's Captain Kirk: Beam Me Up

Written by Bob Snyder
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"War is not a good life, but it's still a life," said Captain Kirk in *Star Trek*.

A new captain is on the bridge at Intel. Kirk Skaugen is now captain of the **Intel PC Client Group** and his job is to lead the Enterprise... to **re-invent the PC**.



Over years the PC world built an empire...destroyed many other worlds of technology (e.g., the electronic typewriter, fax machine, desktop calculator, cash register...and more).

While at its peak, the PC industry sought to consolidate its conquered lands by inventing platforms like internet. Like the mythical Trojan Horse, the internet, built by the IT industry and harnessed by the PC industry to expand its empire...succeeded in a life of its own. Once grown, the Internet supplanted the PC and its power.

Internet hit the PC with so much force that it knocked the PC from the very center of the IT universe to its current status as just another planet in orbit...or perhaps as far away as even a moon of that planet.

Next came the alien invasion...planet PC is invaded out of nowhere by a race of Tablets. Civilization as we know it is coming to an end. Notebooks killed the desktop, netbooks killed the notebooks, and brother fought brother in the Great Silicon War...

The only hope to save planet PC now rests with Captain Kirk.

You already know the Ultrabook name, you already have an idea of what an Ultrabook is. But the Ultrabooks you saw in holiday 2011 were only the first wave as Intel tries to redefine what the computer is.

Intel's Captain Kirk Skaugen says the next wave of Ultrabook devices, powered by 3rd generation Intel Core™ processors with Intel HD Graphics 2500/4000, will bring significant performance improvements.

While there are 18 Ultrabooks in market today, he says Intel has commitments for 75 by the end of 2012.

Ultrabook should eventually converge on convertible hybrid devices, Skaugen says. "We don't think there will be a need to carry around both a PC and a tablet." (That's actually funny as many iPad owners say the same thing.)

Skaugen showed off some of the "convertible" and "slider" Ultrabook concept devices that blur the line between notebook and tablet. "This is where things are going." One interesting concept (called Nikishki) is an Ultrabook that has a palmrest that's a full-width transparent glass touchpad when open. When closed, it offers a Metro touch interface to quickly access calendar, e-mail and other apps.

Last year, Ultrabook hit the mainstream, Skaugen says. This year, with the move to the 3rd generation Core processors, the focus is on “Ultra-thin, ultra-responsive and ultra-secure.” Next year, with the processors “Haswell”, Skaugen predicts Intel will have “the notebook reinvented.”

You'll see performance jumps, maybe as much as 80% improvement in video transcoding, embedded identity security and anti-theft, and new sensors that will “allow new experiences.” (We're thinking Kinect-style experiences here...)

Skaugen has his Intel unit working with panel vendors, battery vendors, hard drive/SSD vendors to reduce size. Soldered motherboards, new smaller heat sinks also helping “move from inches to millimeters” when it comes to laptop thickness.

Skaugen says that by next year, Ultrabooks will consume 20x less power than today when in standby mode, up to 10 days of standby time.

Thunderbolt will be more important on Ultrabook because Ethernet and VGA cables are rapidly becoming too thick for Ultrabook devices. Today, says Skaugen, there are about 20 or so Thunderbolt-based devices, by the end of the year, it will be 100, and “hundreds” into next year.

Intel will push Ultrabooks via merchandising and sales promotion: you can count on point-of-sale materials, training on the value proposition, and Intel “ID share” — where Intel shares the cost of the tooling to bring white box products from ODMs into the marketplace. Working exclusivity within regions to allow white-box vendors to build Ultrabooks, already five ID share form factors are available. Skaugen says this will grow fast and double the volumes for Ultrabook.

White-box volume is the key to Ultrabook success...the plan is not to kill the iPad and tablets but (like Star Trek missions) to absorb the alien culture and create a successful hybrid out of the meeting of the two cultures.

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The captain of the Intel PC Client Group is leading the Enterprise into this new space... And that brings to mind a scene in Star Trek IV, The Voyage Home. After Captain Kirk parks a spaceship, he turns and asks his crew: "Everybody remember where we parked?"

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