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H-P to Expand Computer Offerings; High-End Model Featuring Chip Developed With Intel Will Unify 3 Separate Lines

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Abstract (Article Summary)

Sun Microsystems Inc., by contrast, is strongly backing AMD's chips as well as its own chip technology called Sparc. Larry Singer, Sun's senior vice president of global marketing, argued that H-P's new PA- RISC technology and other moves are a "death knell" for H-P's Itanium efforts.

Mr. [Peter Blackmore] disagreed. H-P has long said it will offer extensions of its earlier PA-RISC technology for customers who need time to plan a move to Itanium-based computers. As for the hybrid chips, the company characterizes them as an extension to its x86-based computers that doesn't weaken its commitment to Itanium. "We are dead set on Itanium," Mr. Blackmore said.

Full Text (448   words)

Hewlett-Packard Co. is expanding its computer line this week, hoping to dispel doubts about its commitment to a decade-long chip partnership with Intel Corp.

The Palo Alto, Calif., computer maker has long pledged to unify three high-end computer lines into a single technology strain, powered by the Itanium chip family that was jointly designed by H-P and Intel. Such transitions have become a huge issue for corporations, which have invested for years in software programs associated with particular chip technologies.

Itanium-based computers have sold slowly so far. But H-P continues to introduce new models, including two low-end servers scheduled to be announced today with starting prices of $2,800 and $5,700.

Peter Blackmore, executive vice president in charge of the company's enterprise-systems group, predicted that customers will shift to Itanium-based systems during the next 18 months to two years. "The momentum is building," he said.

But H-P's other moves complicate the question of its commitment to Itanium. The company today is also set to introduce new servers based on an updated version of its older chip technology called PA-RISC that offers a 50% performance boost over earlier models. In addition, the company recently indicated that it is likely to offer customers still another alternative to Itanium, following a technology path blazed by Advanced Micro Devices Inc.

AMD, which has long made chips that run software based on Intel's mainstream x86 design, in April began selling a kind of hybrid chip that is more flexible than Itanium. Where the Itanium chip family runs at top speed only on a new generation of 64-bit software, chips such as AMD's Opteron can run 64-bit programs as well as existing software that processes 32 bits of data at a time.

Intel recently hinted that it will eventually offer a similar hybrid chip. It is expected to give further details of its plans at a technology conference that begins Feb. 17. H-P has indicated it will also offer customers the choice of a hybrid chip, but it hasn't specified whether it will use products from Intel or AMD.

Sun Microsystems Inc., by contrast, is strongly backing AMD's chips as well as its own chip technology called Sparc. Larry Singer, Sun's senior vice president of global marketing, argued that H-P's new PA- RISC technology and other moves are a "death knell" for H-P's Itanium efforts.

Mr. Blackmore disagreed. H-P has long said it will offer extensions of its earlier PA-RISC technology for customers who need time to plan a move to Itanium-based computers. As for the hybrid chips, the company characterizes them as an extension to its x86-based computers that doesn't weaken its commitment to Itanium. "We are dead set on Itanium," Mr. Blackmore said.

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