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Welcome to Smart Developer

Telephone Friend

The fallout of Nokia's abrupt exit from the MeeGo development community is just starting to shake through the smartphone industry. We

can guess we will see a pause in MeeGo's smartphone branch, but there's much more to MeeGo than just phones. As for the rest of MeeGo, opinions vary. Intel doesn't really have to stop working on MeeGo just because Nokia stopped. Remember that they were already working on an operating system before all this happened. Intel's Moblin OS was the original code base that Intel contributed to start MeeGo in the first place. Given that they clearly want their own operating system, there doesn't seem any benefit in going back to work on Moblin rather than just continuing with MeeGo. It is really bad marketing to roll out a new identity under intense celebration and fanfare, only to change your mind and retreat to your old identity a few months later. (In fact, it is so bad that no one has done it since Jack-in-the-Box restaurant changed its name to Monterrey Jacks back in 1985.)

Intel will probably keep working on its own operating system. The real question is, how much will they invest in it? Are they willing to pick up the extra burden of the previously shared costs that Nokia dropped – not just in terms of development, but also the marketing and public relations it will take to give MeeGo a fighting chance to maintain its presence? Or will they scale back the grand vision of a universal platform and turn MeeGo into a less ambitious in-house system?

Many are convinced that Intel will just drop MeeGo altogether or, at least, that it will completely disappear from the smartphone space, which it never did really have a chance to fully inhabit. But sometimes exploring a less likely scenario is a useful means for analyzing the relationships among the various players.

Another option that almost no one is talking about is whether Intel will seek out another smartphone partner to replace Nokia. The very modular MeeGo system is designed to support separate "user experience" modules running atop a core of common MeeGo components. Instead of having to maintain a whole OS, a potential partner would only have to maintain a smartphone "user experience"

layer, which would (theoretically) be less trouble. Of course, switching operating environments requires so much effort and introduces so much uncertainty. Why go to all the trouble – for a system that hasn't even totally gotten itself off the drawing board? The hypothetical question to this hypothetical answer would be, because this move by Nokia and Microsoft just reinvented the landscape and will force changes to everybody's business plans.

Nokia and Microsoft wasted no time in announcing that their new collaboration will be the "third ecosystem." They are clearly angling to present themselves as a third big player in the smartphone market, along with Apple and Google/Android.

The other vendors who are locked out of this trio will need to make a convincing case that they, not Nokia, should be the third player. No one is going to be eager to sit back and let Nokiasoft stroll up for a coronation. How will these smaller companies compete with an ecosystem that contains the largest phone maker in the world and the largest software company in the world?

Maybe by teaming up with the largest chip maker in the world?

You might be wondering why any vendor would hitch up with the relatively untested MeeGo when they could just sign on with Android. One reason might be because the vendor wants more autonomy and more freedom to develop their own Internet business, rather than having to cede that part of the system to the Google-infused Android.

Will Intel manage to land another MeeGo partner? Perhaps it isn't so likely – but it still isn't impossible. If the Nokia breakup had happened six months later, when MeeGo was just a little farther along, this kind of scenario would have more of a chance. But fortunes change quickly in this business, and as long as Intel continues to invest in MeeGo, they might just keep looking for another telephone friend.

Joe