Off and running with ESC
Check out the highlights of ESC Boston

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(09/09/09, 12:27:00 PM EDT)

Conventional wisdom says that the way to grab headlines at trade shows is to hold all announcements until the opening day, then schedule a press conference or a big, splashy event to launch your new product while beating the publicity drums so loudly you might be heard in a neighboring state.

You can call it the Big Bang Theory of marketing.

Except that Microsoft just doesn't buy it. Last week--in the run-up to Labor Day of all things— the software giant announced the availability of a public test build of the embedded version of its Windows 7 platform, dubbed Windows Embedded Standard 2011 (formerly code-named "Quebec").

In doing so Microsoft may prove itself as adept at fancy marketing footwork as it is at keeping government regulators at bay. By kick-starting Windows Embedded Standard 2011 before ESC Boston (Sept. 21"24 at the Hynes Convention Center), the company gives itself an opportunity to hold detailed, one-on-one product-specific discussions about its new OS at the conference.

What's more, on Tuesday, Sept. 22 at 10:30 am Kevin Dallas, general manager of Microsoft's Windows Embedded Business Unit, is scheduled to deliver a keynote address at ESC, focusing on Embedded Standard 2011 and including an update about its release schedule; the final release is expected somewhere during the second half of 2010.

There's no reason to wait that long. Sign up for the Build Your Own Embedded System (BYOES) sessions at ESC you'll be able to take home a design kit based on Windows Embedded Standard 2011 and featuring Intel's Z510 GHz Atom processor. I know, at this point you're probably thinking 'why all the effort to capture my attention'?

For starters, Windows Embedded Standard 2011 succeeds Windows Embedded Standard 2009, which is a Windows XP-based OS. Unlike v. '09, the new release supports both 32-bit and 64-bit processor architectures and is component-based, so device manufacturers can choose the features they want to install for particular devices. This last bit is key since Windows Embedded is frequently used on thin-client, kiosk and consumer devices, so the modular nature of the OS will enable OEMs in these markets to select just those drivers, or other parts of Windows, needed to customize and differentiate their products, eliminating the need to develop a full platform on their own.

A few other reasons why I expect designers to look favorably on the new embedded OS:

The modular nature of the OS will ease the burden of engineers tasked with squeezing Microsoft's usually bloated code package (possibly several hundred MB in this case) into their embedded designs.

Embedded 2011 includes tools for OEMs to deliver solutions that save energy, including APIs for developers to build applications that improve CPU idle time, which should lead to longer battery life in portable apps.

Embedded 2011 is based on Windows 7 so it includes the latest versions of several regular Windows applications and frameworks, such as Internet Explorer 8, Windows Media Player 12,

the Windows Touch multi-gesture interface for touch screen devices and the graphical user interface Windows Aero.

Embedded 2011 is the first Microsoft embedded operating system that comes with full support for Internet Protocol version 6 (IPv6), supplanting the 20-plus-year-old IPv4, which is also supported.

The Windows Embedded Standard 2011 Community Technology Preview "CTP is a Microsoft euphemism for the fact that despite its attractive features there is still work to be done before the official launch--can be downloaded at the Microsoft Connect site. For more information on Windows Embedded Standard 2011 at ESC visit the Microsoft booth (No. 400). For info on ESC's BYOES program is also available.