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CNET: Windows CE to become 'Windows powered'

Paul Thurrott | Nov 30, 1999

In a stunning development reminiscent of the decision to rename Windows NT 5.0 as Windows 2000, Microsoft will soon drop the "Windows CE" moniker and rebadge these non-PC devices as "Windows Powered." Windows CE hasn't exactly set the world on fire since its release three years ago; Microsoft decided to drop the CE name as a result and focus on the core "Windows" name instead.

"This isn't a major change. This is just a naming thing," said Brian Shafer, a marketing manager the business unit at Microsoft responsible for Windows CE. "Whatever's under the covers, Windows CE or Windows 9x or whatever, that's less relevant to the average consumer."

If only that were true: The name "Windows Powered" does more than suggest that the Windows operating system is running on the device. Windows CE, however, is Windows by name only: Though it shares many low-level programming calls with its true Windows brethren, Windows CE is a different operating system all together and it will not run Windows applications or use the same drivers. This will surely cause confusion in the marketplace.

"When you buy a device, you buy a complete thing. It's not like a PC where you can upgrade it whenever you want," said Phil Holden, product manager the Windows CE

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group. "When we're talking to the \[average\] consumer, it's pretty clear that they care what the device does, but not so much what the underlying operating system is."

3Com, Handspring, Sony, and others would disagree: The vast majority of handheld non-PC devices run on the Palm OS, which has been kicking CE's butt from day one. The "CE" in Windows CE originally stood for "Consumer Electronics," the market Microsoft targeted in 1995 when it launched the Pegasus program that begat Windows CE. But Windows CE was soon modified to support a variety of markets, including set-top boxes, manufacturing, and other information appliances, so the CE moniker stopped meaning anything anyway

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