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Microsoft

Silverlight Shines at International Broadcasting Conference 2008 in Amsterdam

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Editor's note — Sept. 16, 2008 —
for clarity purposes, the last response in this Q&A has been updated to include Windows Media.

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands — Sept. 9, 2008 — Microsoft Silverlight has recently played a major role helping to shape some of the world's biggest events in recent months. Silverlight – Microsoft's cross-browser, cross-platform solution for delivering rich interactive applications and content experiences on the Web – helped viewers experience both the Olympic Games and the U.S. Democratic National Convention on the Web, providing an interactive, high-quality way for people to view both events.

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Scott Guthrie, Corporate Vice President, Microsoft .NET Developer Division

Later this week, at the International Broadcasting Conference (IBC) 2008 in Amsterdam, Microsoft Corp. will demonstrate an important new capability for Silverlight – playback of H.264-based video. H264 is a standard video specification that delivers high-definition video over a variety of delivery channels. During the event, Microsoft will also highlight how customers in Europe are reaping the benefits of adopting Silverlight.

The company recently made a strategic investment in Move Networks Inc., as the two companies continue to work together to deliver high-quality, skip-free Internet television programming over HTTP-based networks.

To learn more about these and other Silverlight milestones, PressPass recently spoke with **Scott Guthrie**, corporate vice president of Microsoft's Developer Division and the head of the Silverlight design team.

PressPass: Will you be showing or announcing anything new at the IBC conference this week?

Guthrie: Yes. At IBC 2008 we will be demonstrating a technology preview of H.264 video and Advanced Audio Coding (AAC) audio playback support in Silverlight, and H.264 authoring using Microsoft Expression Encoder and Windows Server 2008 for delivery. Until now, Silverlight has supported the SMPTE VC-1 and Windows Media formats, as well as MP3 for audio, enabling customers to take advantage of broad support across the Windows Media ecosystem, including third-party tools, service providers and content delivery networks.

We've always wanted Silverlight to support a variety of formats, so today we're announcing that H.264 and AAC support will be available in a future version of Silverlight, which will offer content owners greater flexibility and choice to deliver video and audio.

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PressPass: Historically, people have associated Microsoft with VC-1. Does this signal a change in direction?

Guthrie: No. Although we have been working with VC-1 for some time, it's not widely recognized that Microsoft has also been an active participant in the standardization of H.264/MPEG AVC for many years, and we've included H.264 support in several Microsoft products. Microsoft's Gary Sullivan was the chairman of the Joint Video Team (JVT), which developed the H.264 standard, and he recently accepted an Emmy Award on behalf of the JVT.

PressPass: Does this mean that Silverlight is moving away from Windows Media?

Guthrie: Not at all. This is about offering our customers more choice. Media producers and distributors around the world have enjoyed the high quality, flexibility and affordability of Windows Media formats for over a decade. As a testament to its pervasiveness, Windows Media can be found in almost every conceivable media scenario from desktop home video to feature films and TV broadcasts.

PressPass: Since you're participating in a European broadcasting event this week, can you tell us what sort of reception Silverlight has been getting among European media customers?

Guthrie: Silverlight adoption by major media, broadcasting and content companies has continued to grow significantly in European markets. Examples include innovative live and video-on-demand (VOD) offerings from France Television, ITV, L'Equipe TV, MSN UK, NRK, RAI, RTL, SBS, Setanta and TF1.

Leading French VOD platform TF1 VISION will soon launch its new Silverlight-based service, which will offer new levels of interactivity to users on both Windows and Mac browsers. Utilizing an innovative feature called Deep Zoom, users will navigate, search and discover media from TF1 VISION's vast library through a multi-dimensional visual interface and will then view the selected video through the TF1 VISION interactive Silverlight player.

PressPass: You also just recently announced investment in Move Networks. Can you tell us a little about that?

Guthrie: In August, Microsoft took an equity stake in Move Networks, a leader in HTTP-based video delivery. Move has developed an adaptive streaming technology that seamlessly adjusts image quality to fit available bandwidth on each viewer's Internet connection, creating a high-quality Internet television viewing experience. This investment builds on a strategic partnership we announced with Move Networks in March of 2008.

PressPass: What do you hope to get out of this investment?

Guthrie: The combination of Microsoft and Move Networks' technologies allows users to experience high-quality, skip-free Internet television programming and allows media companies to insert branding, navigation, advertising and other rich interactive elements in and around their Internet television video streams.

PressPass: Can you provide an example of what this collaboration can do?

Guthrie: The live, online webcast of the Democratic National Convention was the first large demonstration of the integration of Move Networks and Silverlight. It was a technological success and tremendously popular, with visitors to the official convention Web site viewing more than 350,000 hours of video. It allowed viewers to experience the convention online like never before. We've heard customers say it was the highest-quality video experience they have ever seen online.

PressPass: Silverlight 2 is scheduled for final release this fall. What can you tell me about some of its new features?

Guthrie: One of the key advantages of Silverlight 2, which will ship later this fall, is that it includes a cross-browser, cross-platform version of the Microsoft .NET Framework, specifically optimized for rich Internet applications (RIAs). That means you can build Silverlight applications using .NET languages, so the large talent pool of more than 4 million .NET developers worldwide can now create RIAs using their existing skills and tools, reducing time to market and raising quality for our customers.

Silverlight 2 also includes built-in controls and skinning capabilities, giving developers a foundation for building applications.

There are a number of other great features developers can get excited about, but what it really boils down to is that Silverlight 2 was expressly built for developing powerful RIAs for the Web and stunning media experiences.

PressPass: Finally, we understand that Silverlight was involved in one of the largest online video events in history: the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. How did the technology perform?

Guthrie: Looking at the data, I'd give it a gold medal. This event really helped demonstrate Silverlight's capabilities to the international broadcasting industry. The immersive and interactive experience featured some of the highest-quality video ever seen on the Web, and enhanced data such as results and athlete information that could be overlaid on the video stream.

On the Silverlight-enhanced NBC Olympics site, the average viewing time was over 27 minutes, as opposed to an average of just three minutes on some Flash-powered sites broadcasting Olympics coverage elsewhere. We think this indicates Silverlight provides a more compelling, engaging and rich media experience for viewers.

In addition to NBC, media companies all over the world used Silverlight or Windows Media to deliver Olympics coverage on the Web. Silverlight and Windows Media were used in seven of the top 10 European Internet markets: Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland. In the Asia-Pacific Region, China, Japan, Korea and New Zealand all used Microsoft technologies to power their online Olympics experience. China Central Television (CCTV) used Microsoft technology to deliver more live streaming video of the games than any other broadcaster — more than 3,800 hours of live Windows Media video using Windows Server 2008 — and reached tens of millions of Chinese fans.