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New HP-Intel pact could hit PC clones hard

[Computing Canada, July 6, 1994](#) by [Paul Barker](#)

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The signing of a technology agreement between Intel Corp. and Hewlett-Packard Co. will drastically alter the PC computing landscape and destroy the x86 processor clone market, a Silicon Valley analyst says.

The two companies recently announced that they would jointly develop a new 64-bit architecture designed to compete with the Sparc chip from Sun Microsystems Corp., Digital Equipment Corp.'s Alpha and the PowerPC.

Linley Gwennap, editor of the Micro-processor Report, a monthly newsletter in Sebastopol, Calif., described it as a good arrangement for both companies, especially HP which "has been struggling" with its own RISC (reduced instruction set computing) architecture.

"The biggest point of this announcement is the fact that Intel is signalling that the x86 architecture they've been using for so long is running out of steam," said Gwennap. "This is the first time they've admitted that in public."

Intel, he said, has dominated the PC market but has traditionally been weak when it comes to workstations and servers.

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Both companies, he added, are coming out and saying that RISC is not going to last much beyond the end of the decade.

The planned architecture will maintain binary compatibility with both company's software bases.

According to Gwennap, the agreement "hammers home the point" that it's going to take a lot of financial backing to push a new architecture.

"You have Intel and HP on one hand and IBM, Apple and Motorola on the other," he said. "Even Sun and Digital look kind of paltry in comparison to these massive conglomerates of companies."

 Political fallout

But the key political fallout will take place in the clone market, said Gwennap.

The Intel-HP tandem, he said, is going to make it very difficult for other companies to build processors that are compatible with the new architecture "What do companies like AMD (Advanced Micro Devices) and Cyrix do? It's going to be tough for them to push the x86 architecture without Intel's backing."

Gwennap said it's possible a third alliance could surface, one involving Compaq Computer Corp. and AMD.

Intel spokesman Howard High said the intent of the technology agreement is to have a single architecture that will replace all others from either company.

"It's a very competitive marketplace," he said. "We like to think that Intel keeps enough things happening on the table to keep all of our competitors worried."

High estimated it will take up to four years to develop the new architecture.

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