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Atari Online News, Etc.
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~ Facebook To Buy Opera? ~ Final Windows 8 Tests! ~ Megaupload Lawyers!

- * Facebook Stock Closes Lower! *-
- * Playing Video Games With Your Mind! *-
- * Mitt Romney's Official App America Gaffe! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
 "*****"

The U.S. presidential campaign is on - Romney versus Obama. Already the gloves are off in what is already being predicted as the most negative presidential campaign ever. And you know what, I believe it. Obama has a lot to defend in the hopes to get reelected. I'll be curious to learn what his campaign's "catch-phrase" will be this time around!

Still hectic around here these days. We're still working to get my in-laws ready to move into their new digs. It's quite a chore to figure out immediate needs to essentially start life all over again. Most of the daily life needs that we all take for granted have to be determined, and obtained all over again. I don't know how everyone is able to manage it all, but they are, somehow.

Again, it's another late release this week, so I'm going to finish off this issue and let you have at it!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Activision Settles with 'Modern Warfare 2' Makers!
 "*****" Wii U, Sequels Take Another Swing at E3!
 Video Games You Play with Your Mind!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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The makers of "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2" and game publisher Activision Blizzard Inc. have agreed to lay down arms in a legal fight over millions of dollars in royalties.

The two sides said Thursday that they had settled the matter out of court. The terms were not disclosed.

Activision, a subsidiary of France's Vivendi SA, said it doesn't believe the settlement's one-time expense will materially affect its earnings outlook for the current quarter or calendar year due to unexpectedly good performance recently.

Jason West and Vincent Zampella, former heads of Activision game studio Infinity Ward, had sued Activision for wrongful dismissal after the company fired them in March 2010. The pair claimed they were fired to avoid paying them bonuses and sought more than \$36 million based on the game's profits following its release in November 2009. They later raised their claim to over \$1 billion.

Activision countersued, accusing them of conspiring to take their secrets to rival Electronic Arts Inc. and breaching their contractual and financial duties. Activision also said West and Zampella poisoned the atmosphere at Infinity Ward against Activision, prompting dozens of developers to follow them out the door.

The pair later formed a new company called Respawn Entertainment LLC, which is currently developing games for EA.

Two weeks ago, Activision and EA settled a lawsuit over whether EA unfairly recruited the executives while they were under contract.

EA hailed the settlement between Activision and the game developers as a victory.

"Activision's refusal to pay their talent and attempt to blame EA were absurd. This settlement is a vindication of Vince and Jason, and the right of creative artists to collect the rewards due for their hard work," it said in a statement.

Shares of Activision rose 9 cents to \$11.83 in after-hours trading after closing down 17 cents, or 1.4 percent, at \$11.74. EA shares were unchanged after-hours but had closed down 53 cents, or 3.8 percent, at \$13.62 in the regular session.

Wii U, Sequels Take Another Swing at E3

Is the Wii U right for you?

At last year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3), Nintendo captured most of the spotlight by unveiling the Wii's successor, a high-definition console called the Wii U that utilizes a tablet-like touchscreen controller. Attention alone wasn't enough to declare a victory. Folks weren't, well, feeling it. Critical reaction was mixed, and the Japanese gaming giant's stock dropped.

"Nintendo has an uphill battle this year," said Morgan Webb, co-host of

the G4 gaming show "X-Play." "It's really a branding problem. I think a lot of people are still confused about the Wii U. They're going to have a hard time convincing people that this could be a better gaming experience than the iPad."

At this year's E3 convention in Los Angeles next week, Nintendo Co. will attempt to assuage such concerns by introducing gamers to titles that will be available for Wii U when it's expected to launch later this year. Previously, the "Mario Bros." creator only teased what was capable through a series of technology demonstrations.

E3 comes at a time when the gaming industry could use a few good parties and pep talks. The NPD Group, a research firm that tracks the U.S. sales of game software, hardware and accessories, said that while consumers spent more than \$1 billion on games and accompanying gizmos in April, retail sales fell 32 percent from a year ago, the fifth month of decline.

The continued interest in cheaper-to-produce mobile, social and downloadable games is expected to be showcased more than ever before at E3, a flashy extravaganza typically focused on building buzz for the loudest and sexiest games. Zynga, the developer of social games like "FarmVille" and "Words With Friends," will have a presence at E3 for the first time.

"Every time I go to E3, I'm usually surprised," said Jay Wilson, lead designer of the role-playing game "Diablo III." "I expect to be surprised again. What I hope is that no matter what platform people are working on, no matter what new area that they're exploring, the most important thing is gameplay. If a game provides great gameplay, the platform doesn't really matter."

Indeed, a strong line-up of games will be integral to the future success of the Wii U, a lesson Nintendo learned the hard way after last year's lackluster launch of the 3DS, its glasses-free 3-D handheld device. "X-Play's" Webb thinks Nintendo could win over the E3 crowd if it introduces innovative, unexpected, must-own games that appeal equally to both hardcore and casual gamers.

Unless Nintendo's fellow first-party publishers Sony Corp. or Microsoft Corp. unveil new hardware or radical updates to their respective PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 consoles, the E3 spotlight for better or worse will undoubtedly be shining back in Nintendo's direction. (Microsoft and Sony have previously shot down rumors they'd unleash new consoles at this year's E3.)

"The Wii U was announced last year, and that stimulates all kinds of thoughts about what's possible," said Mark Lamia, the studio head at "Call of Duty: Black Ops II" developer Treyarch. "It'll be interesting to see what happens with the first parties. It's always an exciting time when rumors are in the air, and we see if E3 is the time when they become more than rumors."

Most other game makers will use the expo to hype new entries in their seemingly never-ending franchises. There's Activision's "Call of Duty: Black Ops II," Microsoft's "Halo 4" and "Forza Horizon," Sony's "God of War: Ascension" and "LittleBigPlanet Karting," Ubisoft's "Far Cry 3" and "Assassin's Creed III," as well as the revealing of several other new chapters.

Some sequels at E3 are emerging from deep within the vault. Franchises

once considered extinct, such as invasion simulator "X-COM," stealthy shooter "Hitman" and town builder "SimCity," will return to a vastly different landscape. Will these once beloved series be re-embraced? It's a strategy that's worked for some ("Twisted Metal") but failed others ("Syndicate").

Electronic Arts Inc. will show off such games as the real-world military simulator "Medal of Honor: Warfighter," a new iteration of its "Need for Speed" racing series and the sci-fi horror sequel "Dead Space 3." EA, like many publishers, will also be talking technology, focusing on advancements with its Frostbite graphics engine, digital distribution and cloud computing

"Cloud competing isn't rocket science," said Patrick Soderlund, executive vice president at the EA Games label. "It is a great feature that we're embracing as a game company. It's just a natural evolution that I think will be used in most of our products, to some extent."

Video Games You Play with Your Mind

The gaming controller of the future won't have joysticks or buttons; it'll wrap around your head. A number of companies like San Jose-based NeuroSky are developing affordable, consumer-ready controllers that takes cues from the electrical signals in a wearer's brain to dictate onscreen action. Here, a concise guide to the new smart technology:

How does it work?

The head-mounted controller reads the brain's electrical activity much in the same way that an electroencephalograph, or EEG, works. It then beams that information via Bluetooth to a connected smartphone. NeuroSky, Inc., which has made news with a Star Wars-based children's toy called Force Trainer that let children suspend a ping pong ball in the air using a fan and their brainwaves, sells a mind-control headset called MindWave Mobile.

Does it read your thoughts?

Not exactly. The technology only differentiates between between two states: relaxed or concentrating. The controller can't track "specific, purposeful actions," says Timothy Hay at The Wall Street Journal. "Some players of mind games might be underwhelmed that they don't have total control in the same way they could with a joystick."

What are the games like?

The NeuroSky controller comes with an interactive movie called MyndPlay, an immersive experience that's like the popular line of "Choose Your Own Adventure" books, says Edwin Kee at Ubergizmo, because it allows users to make choices that steer the movie's plot in different directions. Another company called Emotiv Systems, which offers a similar multi-sensor device, packages a variety of popular titles like Call of Duty and World of Warcraft, retinkered to work with their brainwave-sensing headset.

What else can it do?

Some psychiatrists think the technology could help improve mental health for patients suffering from conditions like anxiety or post-traumatic

stress disorder. The attention required to use one of these brain controllers actually has a calming effect on the mind, game designer Jane McGonigal tells The Wall Street Journal. Another game called FocusPocus helps players "become smarter" by using concentration techniques commonly used to fight ADHD symptoms, says Ben Kersey at Slashgear.

Is the headsets and games available now?

Yes. You can order the MindWave Mobile headset from the company's website for \$130. Compatible games can be downloaded at the site, and a few are already available for Android and the iPhone.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Dutch Parliament Officially Rejects ACTA

Legal Good news everyone! The Dutch parliament has just officially rejected ACTA. In addition, parliament has also accepted an additional motion which prohibits the government from signing similar agreements in the future. It was originally the plan to wait for the ACTA vote in the EU parliament, but a majority in the Dutch parliament felt that ACTA was too dangerous not to throw into the bin right away, EU vote or no. I'm not exactly sure what this means for ACTA as a whole, but it's my understanding that if one member state votes against ACTA - which we just did - it's effectively dead in the EU.

Facebook Closes Lower Once Again

After a brief reprieve in morning trading, Facebook's stock once again closed lower on Wednesday, nearly \$10 below its initial public offering price.

Shares of Facebook Inc. dropped 65 cents, or 2.3 percent, to close at \$28.19. It's the third consecutive trading day the stock has dropped from the previous close. It got some relief earlier in the day, going as high as \$29.55.

Wednesday's close is down about 26 percent from the stock's IPO price of \$38. Facebook began trading on the Nasdaq Stock Market on May 18. The day started with a delay due to trading market glitches and didn't get much better from there.

Still, the IPO raised \$16 billion for Facebook and early investors, making it one of the largest IPOs ever. But many investors were expecting the stock to go higher on the first day. Instead, it went up less than 1 percent to \$38.23 that day, before falling since then.

Wednesday was a down day for the broader market as well, with the Dow Jones industrial average closing down 161 points. Other social media stocks, such as Zynga Inc. and Yelp Inc., also headed lower.

Oracle Suffers Major Setback in Google Case

A U.S. judge dismissed Oracle Corp's copyright claims against Google Inc. for parts of the Java programming language, knocking out Oracle's prime vehicle for damages in a high stakes legal battle over smartphones.

The ruling on Thursday from a San Francisco federal judge is the latest blow to Oracle in its lawsuit against Google. It is one of several intellectual property cases between tech giants over smartphones and tablets using Google's Android operating system.

Apple is scheduled for trial in U.S. courts against Google's Motorola Mobility unit in June, and against Samsung in July. However, Oracle's lawsuit against Google, filed in 2010, was the first in the smartphone wars to go before a jury.

The case examined whether computer language that connects programs and operating systems - known as application programming interfaces, or APIs - can be copyrighted. In a trial that began last month, Oracle claimed Google's Android tramples on its rights to the structure of 37 Java APIs.

Google argued it did not violate Oracle's patents and that Oracle cannot copyright APIs for Java, an open-source or publicly available software language. Android is the best-selling smartphone operating system around the world.

Oracle sought roughly \$1 billion on its copyright claims, but the jury deadlocked on a key copyright issue. They then found that Google did not infringe two of Oracle's patents, which ended the trial last week before damages could be considered.

Meanwhile, U.S. District Judge William Alsup had deferred a legal ruling on the ability to copyright 37 Java APIs until after the trial.

His ruling on Thursday likely eliminates the ability of Oracle to seek an immediate retrial against Google in San Francisco federal court.

Oracle spokeswoman Deborah Hellinger said the company will "vigorously appeal" Alsup's order. "This ruling, if permitted to stand, would undermine the protection for innovation and invention in the United States," Hellinger wrote in an email.

Alsup's written order does not address whether all Java APIs are free to use without a license - or whether the structure of any computer program may be stolen.

"Rather, it holds on the specific facts of this case, the particular elements replicated by Google were free for all to use," Alsup wrote.

Google spokesman Jim Prosser said the decision upholds the principle that open computer languages are essential for software development.

"It's a good day for collaboration and innovation," Prosser said.

The case in U.S. District Court, Northern District of California is Oracle America, Inc v. Google Inc, 10-3561.

Here's How the Stuxnet Virus Could Be Used Against the U.S.

The cat is out of the bag: The United States is the first known country to carry out a sustained cyber attack with the intent of destroying another country's infrastructure. Earlier today, The New York Times' David Sanger confirmed America's role in developing Stuxnet, the computer worm deployed against Iran's nuclear facilities in coordination with the Israeli government. In interviews with current and former American, European, and Israeli officials, Sanger outlined the Obama administration's decision to use the sophisticated virus, code-named Olympic Games, which was originally developed by the Bush administration.

For cyber security experts, the coming-out party of Stuxnet in 2010, after it malfunctioned and spread across the world, was a worrying event. The code itself is 50 times bigger than your ordinary computer worm and, unlike most viruses, is capable of hijacking industrial facilities like nuclear reactors or chemical plants. With its release, anyone could download and manipulate the Stuxnet code for their own purposes. But now, with America's role confirmed, the fear is that a red target hangs on its back. What if Stuxnet was used against the U.S.?

The prospect has long worried Sean McGurk, former director of Homeland Security's national cybersecurity operations center. Not only has the Stuxnet technology been instantly democratized but it's also highly susceptible to being reverse engineered. In March, he aired his concerns with 60 Minutes' Steve Kroft, before America's role in creating Stuxnet was confirmed:

Kroft: Sounds a little bit like Pandora's box.

McGurk: Yes.

Kroft: Whoever launched this attack--

McGurk: They opened up the box. They demonstrated the capability. They showed the ability and the desire to do so. And it's not something that can be put back.

Kroft: If somebody in the government had come to you and said, "Look, we're thinking about doing this. What do you think?" What would you have told them?

McGurk: I would have strongly cautioned them against it because of the unintended consequences of releasing such a code.

What sort of unintended consequences? According to McGurk, it has given countries "like Russia and China, not to mention terrorist groups and gangs of cybercriminals for hire, a textbook on how to attack key U.S. installations." Those types of installations include U.S. nuclear power reactors, electric companies, and other industrial facilities controlling everything from chemicals to baby formula, according to McGurk. And he's not the only one worrying.

In 2010, Dean Turner, director of the Global Intelligence Network at Symantec Corp., told a Senate hearing that the "real-world implications of Stuxnet are beyond any threat we have seen in the past." According to the Associated Press, he said the virus's risks go beyond industrial infrastructure and include the loss of sensitive intellectual property data, which can be silently stolen. So who would be able to carry out such an attack? Apparently, quite a few people.

Ralph Langner, a German expert on industrial control systems, told Kroft in March that even non-state actors could use such technologies.

Langner: You don't need many billions, you just need a couple of millions. And this would buy you a decent cyberattack, for example, against the U.S. power grid.

Kroft: If you were a terrorist group or a failed nation state and you had a couple of million dollars, where would you go to find the people that knew how to do this?

Langner: On the Internet.

There were obviously powerful incentives to use the Stuxnet virus, which according to The Times succeeded in destroying 1,000 to 5,000 centrifuges. And of course, ever since the virus went public in 2010, the risk of a third-party using Stuxnet technology for ill has existed. However, with the confirmation that the U.S. broke the cyber threshold, the novelty of using cyberwarfare to attack another country's critical infrastructure is gone. Should we expect Iran to refrain from striking back? As PC World's David Jeffers writes, "We now have to deal with the Internet equivalent of a mustard gas or Agent Orange leak that has the potential to affect us all." It's undoubtedly a scary thought.

Iran: 'Flame' Virus Fight Began with Oil Attack

Computer technicians battling to contain a complex virus last month resorted to the ultimate firewall measures cutting off Internet links to Iran's Oil Ministry, rigs and the hub for nearly all the country's crude exports.

At the time, Iranian officials described it as a data-siphoning blitz on key oil networks.

On Wednesday, they gave it a name: A strike by the powerful "Flame" malware that experts this week have called a new and highly sophisticated program capable of hauling away computer files and even listening in on computer users. Its origins remain a mystery, but international suspicion quickly fell on Israel opening another front in its suspected covert wars with archenemy Tehran.

"This virus penetrated some fields. One of them was the oil sector," said Gholam Reza Jalali, who heads an Iranian military unit in charge of fighting sabotage. "Fortunately, we detected and controlled this single incident."

The Flame virus a mix of cyberspy and hard-drive burglar has been detected across the Middle East recently. But Iran's linkage to the oil

network attack in April could mark its first major infiltration and suggests a significant escalation in attempts to disrupt Iran's key commercial and nuclear sites. Iran is one of the world's leading oil producers.

Two years ago, a virus called Stuxnet tailored to disrupt Iran's nuclear centrifuges caused some setbacks within its uranium enrichment labs and infected an estimated 16,000 computers, Iranian officials say. At least two other smaller viruses have been detected in nuclear and industrial centers.

The Flame program, however, is widely considered as a technological leap in break-in programming. Some experts also see the same high level of engineering shared by Stuxnet, which many suspect was the work of Israeli intelligence.

"It is very complex and very sophisticated," said Marco Obiso, cybersecurity coordinator at the U.N.'s International Telecommunication Union in Geneva. "It's one of the most serious yet."

Israel, a world leader in computer security, has never confirmed or denied any involvement in Stuxnet or other viruses that have hit Iranian networks nationwide.

Israel fears that Iran's nuclear program is geared toward developing a weapon that might be turned against it and Israel itself is believed to have nuclear weapons.

Israeli leaders have repeatedly said that "all options are on the table," a phrase that is widely interpreted as meaning the possibility of a military strike and other measures that could include cyberwarfare.

Already, Iran and Israel have traded accusations of carrying out clandestine hits and attack conspiracies in locales stretching from the Baku to Bangkok.

Iran claims Israeli agents are behind the slayings of at least five nuclear scientists and researchers since 2010. Earlier this month, Iran hanged a man convicted of carrying out one of the killings after allegedly being trained by Israel's Mossad spy agency. Israel denied any role.

Authorities in several countries, meanwhile, are investigating possible Iranian links to bombings and plots against Israeli targets and others, including a wide-ranging probe in Azerbaijan's capital Baku.

On the cyber front, Iran says it has sharply boosted its defenses by creating special computer corps to protect crucial online infrastructure. Iran also claims it seeks to build its own Internet buffered from the global web, but experts have raised serious questions about its feasibility.

Iran's Deputy Minister of Communications and Information Technology Ali Hakim Javadi was quoted by the official IRNA news agency Wednesday as saying that Iranian experts have produced an anti-virus program capable of identifying and removing Flame.

"The anti-virus software was delivered to selected organizations in early May," he said.

That would have been at least two weeks after officials say it penetrated

Iran's Oil Ministry and related sites. Within hours, technicians decided to close off the Internet connections to the ministry, oil rigs and the Khark Island oil terminal, the jump off point for about 80 percent of Iran's daily 2.2 million barrels of crude exports.

Gholam Reza Jalali, who heads an Iranian military unit in charge of fighting sabotage, told state radio that the oil industry was the only governmental body seriously affected and that all data lost were later retrieved.

"This virus penetrated some fields. One of them was the oil sector. Fortunately, we detected and controlled this single incident," Jalali said.

Obiso, whose agency is helping to direct the international response to Flame, said the virus first came to the group's attention in mid-April and researchers have been working on unraveling its code since.

"We still think Flame has much more to show," he said.

The Russian Internet security firm Kaspersky Lab ZAO said the Flame virus has struck Iran the hardest, but has been detected in the Palestinian territories, Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

It also has been found in Israel leading some Israeli security officials to suggest the virus could be traced to the U.S. or other Western nations.

Experts describe it as a multitasking mole. It can wipe data off hard drives, but also be a tireless eavesdropper by activating audio systems to listen in on Skype calls or office chatter. It also can also take screenshots, log keystrokes and in one of its more novel functions steal data from Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones.

Israeli's vice premier on Tuesday did little to deflect suspicion about the country's possible involvement.

"Whoever sees the Iranian threat as a significant threat is likely to take various steps, including these, to hobble it," Moshe Yaalon told Army Radio when asked about Flame. "Israel is blessed with high technology, and we boast tools that open all sorts of opportunities for us."

Iran says it has previously discovered one more espionage virus, Duqu, but that the malware did no harm Iran's nuclear or industrial sites. Jalali said Flame is the third.

Dozens of unexplained explosions also have hit the country's gas pipelines in the past two years. Officials have not linked them to cyberattacks, but authorities have not closed the books on the investigations.

Megaupload Lawyers Move To Kill U.S. Internet Piracy Charges

Lawyers for popular file-sharing company Megaupload, accused of copyright theft and internet piracy, have moved to have the case thrown out in the United States and tens of millions of dollars of assets unfrozen, a U.S. counsel said on Thursday.

Before it was shut down in January, Megaupload was one of the world's most

popular websites, where millions of users stored data, either for free or by paying for premium service.

The FBI claims founder Kim Dotcom masterminded a scheme that made more than \$175 million in a few short years by copying and distributing music, movies and other copyrighted content without authorization.

Papers have been filed stating that U.S. federal authorities cannot charge the company with criminal behavior because it is Hong Kong based, and also that no papers have ever been formally served, the lawyer said.

Megaupload's assets were seized and its executives in New Zealand and Holland arrested in January on warrants issued by the FBI alleging money laundering, internet piracy, and illegal file sharing.

But Megaupload's U.S. counsel said the FBI had made a fundamental mistake.

"The law here in the United States is that you can't indict and then serve a company that does not have a presence in the United States," Ira Rothken told Radio New Zealand.

He said the case against Megaupload and its executives should be dismissed.

"This case was flawed from the start, once this case gets dismissed it cannot be fixed," Rothken said.

Megaupload chief executive Dotcom, 39, spent nearly a month in jail after New Zealand police raided a luxury country estate and cut him out of a safe room in which he had barricaded himself.

U.S. authorities have asked for him and three other executives to be extradited.

Megaupload has always maintained that it simply offered online storage, and that music and movie companies were given every opportunity to have illegal material removed.

Dotcom is on bail after he convinced a court that he was not going to abscond.

In the past week he has been allowed back to his mansion, and had travel restrictions eased. A New Zealand judge also ordered prosecutors to give Dotcom's lawyers access to evidence collected against him and co-defendants.

Rothken said he had also filed papers in the U.S. to unfreeze Megaupload funds, which could be used by the defendants to defend themselves.

The FBI was not immediately available for comment.

Australian Facebook Cash Image Leads to Robbery

Two robbers have paid a visit to a house in south-eastern Australia, hours after a teenager posted a photo on Facebook of a large sum of cash.

The masked men, armed with a knife and a club, struck the home of the 17-year-old girl's mother in the country town of Bundanoon on Thursday,

police say.

Her mother told the men her daughter no longer lived there.

It is not clear how the robbers found the family address. The Facebook image was at the grandmother's Sydney house.

The men searched the house and took a small amount of cash and a small number of personal objects before leaving.

Australia map

No-one was injured.

The girl had earlier posted a picture on her Facebook page of a "large sum of cash" she had helped count at her 72-year-old grandmother's home in Sydney, 120 km (75 miles) north-east of Bundanoon.

Following the incident, police have issued a warning over the dangers of posting sensitive information online.

Is Facebook About To Buy Opera To Create Own Facebook Browser?

A Facebook browser that would allow you keep up to date with your social life from in-built plug-ins and features on the menu bar could be on the cards. Pocket-lint has heard from one of its trusted sources that the social networking giant is looking to buy Opera Software, the company behind the Opera web browser.

According to our man in the know, the company could be about to expand into the browser space to take on the likes of Google, Apple, Microsoft, Mozilla and now even Yahoo, who has recently launched its own browser.

The move - which would no doubt send shivers of panic through Google - although unlikely to affect Chrome's continued growth in the short term, would see the two tech giants battle it out on your desktop and mobile for web surfing as well as social networking.

Opera already has a very good mobile browser, which has seen strong growth in the two years it has been available. And Facebook's buying the company would save it having to build a browser from scratch.

Since the Facebook IPO, which netted the company over \$16 billion, Mark Zuckerberg's organisation has plenty of cash to expand. It has also left us in no doubt that it wants to get into the mobile sector more and more. Owning its own browser to market data from users regardless of whether or not they are actually on the Facebook website would be one such way of doing that.

Opera claims to have around 200 million users across all of its platforms. Google, Samsung Unveil New Version of Chromebook

BGoogle will try to win more converts to a computer operating system revolving around its popular Chrome Web browser with a new wave of lightweight laptops built by Samsung Electronics.

Tuesday's release of the next-generation Chromebooks will give Google and

Samsung another opportunity to persuade consumers and businesses to buy an unconventional computer instead of machines running on familiar software by industry pioneers Microsoft Corp. and Apple Inc.

Unlike most computers, Google's Chromebooks don't have a hard drive. They function like terminals dependent on an Internet connection. The laptops come with 16 gigabytes of flash memory the kind found in smartphones, tablet computers and some iPods. Two USB ports allow external hard drives and other devices to be plugged into the machines.

Chromebooks haven't made much of a dent in the market since their debut a year ago. In that time, more people have been embracing Apple's iPad and other tablet computers a factor that has contributed to a slowdown in sales of personal computers.

The cool reception to Chromebooks has raised questions about whether Google misjudged the demand for computers designed to quickly connect to its dominant Internet search engine and ever-expanding stable of other online services, ranging from email to a recently introduced file-storage system called Drive.

"The Chromebooks have had less to offer than tablets, so they haven't been that interesting to consumers," said Gartner analyst Mika Kitagawa.

Google says it always intended to take things slowly with the Chromebooks to give its engineers time to understand the shortcomings of the machines and make the necessary improvements.

"This release is a big step in the journey to bringing (Chromebooks) to the mainstream," said Sundar Pichai, Google's senior vice president of Chrome and apps.

The upgraded laptop, called "Series 5 550," is supposed to run two-and-half times faster than the original machines, and boasts higher-definition video. Google also added features that will enable users to edit documents offline, read more content created in widely used Microsoft applications such as Word and Excel, and retrieve material from another computer at home or an office. More emphasis is being placed on Chrome's Web store, which features more than 50,000 applications.

The price: \$449 for models that only connect to the Internet through Wi-Fi and \$549 for a machine that connects on a 3G network. Samsung's original Chromebooks started out with prices ranging from \$429 to \$499. Like the original Chromebooks, the next-generation machines feature a 12.1-inch screen display and run on an Intel processor.

Google Inc. and Samsung also are introducing a "Chromebox" that can be plugged into a display monitor to create the equivalent of desktop computer. The box will sell for \$329.

The latest Chromebook and new Chromebox will be available online only, beginning in the U.S. on Tuesday, followed by a Wednesday release in the United Kingdom. The products will go on sale in brick-and-mortar stores for the first time in still-to-be-determined Best Buy locations next month.

The expansion beyond Internet-only sales signals Google's determination to attract a mass audience to its Chromebooks, just as it's done with smartphones running on its Android software. More than 300 million mobile devices have been activated on Android since the software's 2008 release.

Without providing specifics, Pichai said several other computer manufacturers will release Chromebooks later this year. Google plans to back the expanded line of Chromebooks with a marketing blitz during the holiday shopping season in November and December.

One reason Google is confident Chromebooks will eventually catch on is because the Chrome Web browser has attracted so many fans in less than four years on the market. The company says more than 200 million people worldwide currently are using the Chrome browser.

Like other laptop and desktop computers, the Chromebooks will have to contend with the accelerating shift to the iPad and other tablets. The iPad 2, an older version of Apple's tablet line, sells for as little as \$399, undercutting the new Chromebook. Other low-cost tablets are expected to hit the market later this year. One of them might even be made by Motorola Mobility, a device maker that Google bought for \$12.5 billion earlier this month. Google so far hasn't commented on Motorola's future plans for the tablet market.

The new Chromebooks also are hitting the market at a time when some prospective computer buyers may be delaying purchases until they can check out machines running on Windows 8, a makeover of Microsoft's operating system that is expected to be released in September or October. Microsoft designed Windows 8 so it can be controlled through touch as well as keyboards. That versatility is expected to inspire the creation of hybrid machines that are part laptop, part tablet.

Microsoft Releases Final Test Version of Windows 8

Microsoft is nearly done with a much-anticipated overhaul of its Windows operating system.

The software maker signaled the makeover is nearly complete with Thursday's release of the final test version of Windows 8.

Windows 8 is considered to be the biggest change in decades to Microsoft's widely used operating system. The software displays applications in a mosaic of tiles and has been designed so it can run desktop, laptop and tablet computers.

PC sales have slowed in the U.S. as consumers delay replacements and instead buy mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. The versatility of Windows 8 is expected to spawn a new generation of computers that are part laptop, part tablet.

The latest test version of Windows 8 is available in 14 languages and includes several improvements from a less-refined version released three months ago. The upgrades include more ways to connect to other Microsoft services, more security controls and more touch-screen features.

Microsoft Corp. hasn't announced when Windows 8 will go on sale yet. Most industry analysts expect the software will be available in September or October.

With Windows 8 looming, more prospective computer buyers may delay their purchases until the new operating system is available.

Microsoft is trying to discourage procrastination with a special promotion that begins Saturday in the U.S., Canada and more than 120 other markets. The program allows buyers of computer running on Windows 7 to upgrade to Windows 8 Pro, when it's available, for \$14.99. Microsoft hasn't announced other prices.

Mitt Romney s Official iPhone App Misspells America

It looks like the Republican candidate is running for President of "Amercia"

After President Obama won his first election with help from effective social media campaigns, Presidential hopeful Mitt Romney has been doing his best to appear at the forefront of modern technology as well. Unfortunately, while Romney has a bustling presence on both Facebook and Twitter, his campaign's recently launched official iPhone app called "With Mitt" has one major problem: It misspells "America."

Where is "Amercia?" After downloading the free app which does little more than overlay some pre-approved text graphics over your own photos, and then ask for campaign contributions the very first screen that is displayed boldly states "I believe in Amercia." Yes, that's A-M-E-R-C-I-A, rather than America. Social networks are already abuzz with the humorous error, and thousands of comments are already flooding Twitter and Facebook as both Romney and Obama supporters share a laugh.

The app has been available for some time now, but has not been taken down or corrected at the time of this writing. Perhaps the Republican candidate is planning on not only changing how we feel about our nation, but also how we spell it. Either way, it's embarrassing to say the least, especially given that the app is meant to be used to spread Romney's message. In this case, it appears that message is "I don't use spellcheck."

Facebook To Let Users Vote on Privacy Changes

Facebook is letting its nearly 1 billion users vote on changes to its privacy policy.

The previously announced changes include new sections explaining how it uses people's information. The updates also reflect recently added features such as a new profile format called Timeline.

The new policy also opens up the possibility for Facebook to start showing people ads on outside websites, targeting the pitches to interests and hobbies that users express on Facebook.

The voting period starts Friday and runs through next week. The company had announced the changes in May, a week before its initial public offering of stock. Facebook's highly anticipated IPO landed with a thud, closing just 23 cents above its \$38 offering price on its first trading day. The stock has declined another 26 percent in the two weeks since then.

This is the second time Facebook Inc. is letting users vote on policy changes. The first time was in 2009 when Facebook was a much smaller, privately held company with fewer than 200 million users.

It may be the last time, though.

Thirty percent of Facebook's 900 million users, or 270 million people, have to vote on the changes for or against to have the process be binding. Otherwise, Facebook considers the vote "advisory."

That will most likely be the case. Facebook's experiment in democracy hasn't panned out as expected. While thousands of people have left comments on Facebook's proposed changes, "our original intent was to get high-quality," and not high-quantity comments, said Erin Egan, Facebook's chief privacy officer of policy.

Facebook said it is still interested in getting user feedback on its policies, but it is reviewing how best to do so.

"While our participatory mechanisms may change, our commitment to greater transparency, accountability and responsiveness will not," Facebook vice president Elliot Schrage wrote in a blog post. "We will explore ways to bring user suggestions and concerns before Facebook's management."

To vote:

<http://on.fb.me/JXVN6J>

Judge Considers Idaho Anonymous Comments Lawsuit

A lawyer for a newspaper website argued Friday that people should be allowed to post anonymous comments on its blogs without fear of being identified and then sued.

But a Republican political leader in northern Idaho, who is seeking the identities of three individuals who commented anonymously about her, argued that she was libeled by a comment and has the right to sue for damages.

District Judge John Luster in Coeur D'Alene said he would rule later on whether a subpoena sought by Kootenai County Republican Central Committee Chairwoman Tina Jacobson against The Spokesman-Review newspaper should be quashed.

Jacobson is seeking the identities of three commenters, including one who suggested in a posting that she might have stolen money from the GOP.

"We're here for the rights of people to speak anonymously on the Internet," said Duane Swinton, attorney for The Spokesman-Review, based in nearby Spokane, Wash. "We're here as an advocate for First Amendment rights."

The newspaper has refused to turn over information about the commenters in a libel lawsuit Jacobson filed in April.

Jacobson is not suing the newspaper. Instead, she is suing a commenter

who posts under the name "almostinnocentbystander," saying that handle was used to post false statements about her handling of local GOP funds.

Jacobson alleges that the newspaper is withholding the commenter's identity.

Attorney Matthew Andersen, representing Jacobson, said his client has the right to confront her accuser in court but cannot do so unless the newspaper releases the identity.

"In Idaho, being called a thief is a per se libelous statement," Andersen said. "She has been called a thief."

Andersen opened the hearing by asking if any of the anonymous bloggers were in the courtroom and wanted to come forward. No one did.

According to the lawsuit, the commenter called "almostinnocentbystander" stated on the newspaper's website that Jacobson had \$10,000 that was missing from the Republican Central Committee.

The statement posted Feb. 14 prompted inquiries from two other commenters, who go by the online handles "Phaedrus" and "OutofStatertater." They questioned the substance of the claim. Jacobson's subpoena also seeks their identities as witnesses in the case.

The original commenter, "almostinnocentbystander," responded to the others "with further allegations of missing funds, obstruction of the Republican Party Central Committee treasurer's report and embezzlement," the lawsuit said.

The comments were posted on the newspaper's blog, Huckleberries Online, and were removed shortly after by the blog's administrator, who noted that the comment regarding the missing funds was an "unsubstantiated accusation made against a local Republican official," according to court documents.

Jacobson is seeking damages of at least \$10,000 from "almostinnocentbystander." The lawsuit also asks a judge to issue a court order barring that individual from committing future acts of libel against Jacobson.

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