

Windows 8 Preview Released For Public Testing

Microsoft has released a preview of its Windows 8 operating system, which is designed to power the next generation of tablets, laptops and PCs.

The new look Windows 8 was made available to the public to download and try out on Wednesday - but it is an incomplete version.

It is the first Microsoft operating system designed to be compatible with low-power microprocessors that are run on mobile devices, in an effort to counter the huge popularity of rival Apple's iPad and Android run devices.

Apple released a preview of its updated operating system Mountain Lion in February, which was also heavily influenced by features found in its mobile devices.

Steven Sinofsky, head of Microsoft's flagship Windows unit, demonstrated the new Windows 8 system at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

He said: "It's an even better Windows than Windows 7." Showing off Windows 8 on a tablet and an ultra book, Mr Sinofsky added: "It's incredibly fast and fluid to just navigate this UI (user interface)."

Windows 7, Microsoft's current operating system, was its fastest-selling ever, accounting for 525 million sales in less than three years.

But the world's largest software company has found itself playing catch up as Apple, Google and Amazon all forged ahead with mobile devices.

Anyone can download the new version of Windows, but it will only work on PCs and laptops running standard Intel chips.

The look of Windows 8 is influenced heavily by the "Metro" style of the current Windows Phone software.

It features brightly-coloured blocks or "tiles" that can be moved around the screen or tapped to go straight into an application.

For the first time, this version of Windows 8 includes the Windows Store, where users can download and try out apps and get access to cloud storage with the ability to move content across a range of devices, including Windows phones.

It also uses a test version of Microsoft's newest browser, Internet Explorer 10.

Developers claim the latest version of Windows 8 has better performance, quality and reliability than the version it released to developers last autumn.

A new version of Windows tends to be released every three years and it is predicted that a full release of Windows 8 could be on the shelves by October.

No indication of what the price might be has been given yet.