
Microsoft: Using technology to tackle climate change



Tackling climate change for Europe is “an incredible opportunity to innovate and compete with the rest of the world.” That’s the view of Microsoft International President Jean-Philippe Courtois, speaking at the recent European Business Summit in Brussels, which was devoted to climate change.

Technology can help by linking entrepreneurs to academics, venture capitalists and big business, Courtois says. He proposes a system that allows entrepreneurs to file patents for ideas across Europe easily and cheaply, with a sort of automated processing that would connect ideas to venture capitalists. Then global companies could use their scale to bring ideas to market faster.



"I think there are a lot of opportunities for Europe to do more of that," Courtois says, "and I think the environment may be the perfect cause to make that happen."

Climate change will affect everyone, but it will have the biggest effect on people who have done the least to cause it, and Microsoft is following founder Bill Gates' prescription for 'creative capitalism.'

The company believes that its expertise in supporting innovation can help. And if Microsoft founder Bill Gates wins a following, 'creative capitalism' will begin to solve problems for those people who have not yet benefitted from technological change, "in particular the billion people who live on less than a dollar a day."

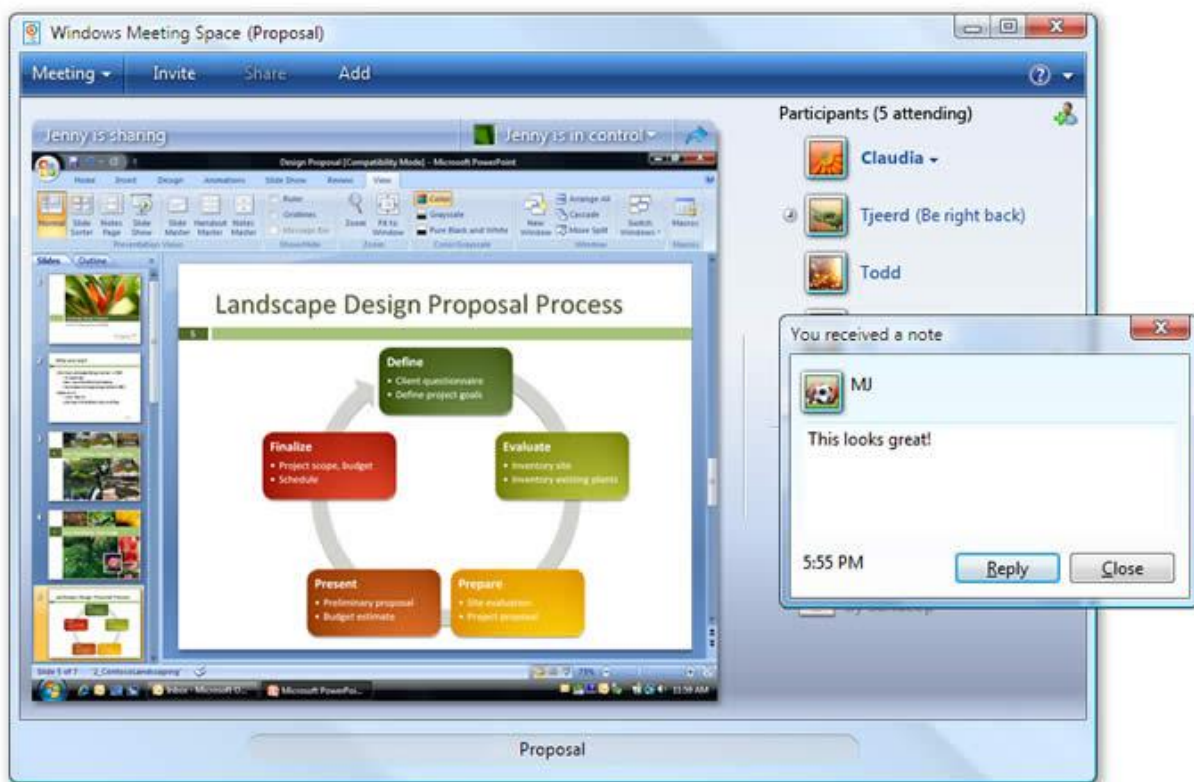
"I hope corporations will dedicate a percentage of their top innovators' time to issues that could help people left out of the global economy," Gates said at the World Economic Forum in Davos in February. "This kind of contribution is even more powerful than giving cash or offering employees' time off to volunteer."

At the European Business Summit in Brussels, Courtois wanted to show how Microsoft can help.

"We think about the way we can innovate in our products and our services to actually enable people, government and businesses to make the planet more environmentally friendly," Courtois says.

Many are the possibilities. Microsoft is trying to play its part for the climate, with a mass transportation system for workers near its US headquarters that saves 45,000 kilometres of car traffic a day.

Other ideas are simple, direct and plainly of self-interest. The new Windows Vista operating system can put the computer to sleep at the touch of a function key, "which is going to save a lot of money in terms of energy spent and the longevity of your PCs," Courtois says, adding that Microsoft has a partnership with environmental organisation World Wide Fund For Nature to educate millions of consumers on how to do that.



But the greatest impact Microsoft can make on the climate comes not from its direct efforts, but as Gates said at Davos, from "when we show how to use technology to create solutions."

Software technology can run a household, managing the lights, washing machine, and battery rechargers in the most cost-effective manner. Computer-to-computer audio-visual connections allow more face-to-face

business meetings without taking trains, planes or cars. Future electric car transportation systems will require new technology.

"We have some incredible scenarios which are not 10 years down the road, they can happen in the next few years at the prototype level," Courtois says. A system of cars using rechargeable batteries has been proposed in which people are going to borrow those cars, "and you are going to deposit those cars where you go, and what you need to do that, is sort of a very smart grid of rechargeable energy to connect drivers and cars themselves with the source of energy."

Training people in IT is also key to solving future problems. Over the last five years Microsoft invested \$235 million on training millions of people, says Courtois, because "Microsoft is about setting a long term objective to be sure we supply the skills needed by the next generation of users."

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