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IDF: Intel's Larrabee Makes a Quiet Debut

By Andy Patrizio
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Intel Executive Vice President Sean Maloney speaks at IDF 2009. Source: Intel.

SAN FRANCISCO -- What should have been Intel's most exciting keynote of the day

here at the Intel Developer Forum turned into a disappointment.

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While the company announced a new server platform, new Xeon processors and several other technology advances, the first public demonstration of "Larrabee," Intel's attempt at a high-performance graphics processor, proved less than exciting here Tuesday.

Sean Maloney, the new head of the Intel Architecture Group, tried to put a light-hearted spin on the demo, stopping in front of the monitor showing off the Larrabee demo and asking the audience "Is there anyone here who cares about Larrabee and what's going on with it?"

There was in fact a lot of interest in Larrabee going into this IDF as people wanted to see what Intel (NASDAQ: INTC) would bring to bear against established veterans nVidia (NASDAQ: NVDA) and ATI/AMD (NYSE: AMD). The demo was a ray traced version of the game "Enemy Territory: Quake Wars," featuring the image of a ship at a dock. The only animation showed ocean waves and an occasional aircraft flying overhead. There was no interactivity or animation and the video was choppy.

Maloney gave no release date or product specifics, would not say the target markets or even the manufacturing process even though Intel has been talking about manufacturing quite a bit since the show began. The last stated release date from Intel was either late this year or early 2010. That does not seem likely now.

"I never thought they were on time and I don't think they are on track," said Jim McGregor, chief technology analyst with In-Stat. "And I don't think they are going to make their goal. Their goal that Pat [Gelsinger, former senior vice president who headed the Larrabee project] said last year was if it can't compete on the highest end, they

won't release it."

But Tony Massimini, chief of technology for Semico Research said not to panic yet. "Intel is always very conservative," he told *InternetNews.com*. "They don't want to promise more than they can deliver. So they are just going to stay mum until they know they can deliver big time."

Joanne Feeney, managing director and senior research analyst for FTN Midwest Securities, was also a little hesitant to declare Larrabee stillborn. "It seems like they are not ready to show us something spectacular. Either means it's late or it's late," she joked.

She added "They know how to do graphics. They are just trying to do something a whole lot better. I expected to hear something. But I believe they've hired the right people. I believe they are putting enough resources into it. I'm not worried."

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