

Google Takes Chrome App Launcher Cross Platform Making Any Computer A Chromebook Even Windows PCs & Apple Macs

Access to Chrome OS's more powerful, flexible apps trickling through Chrome -- the browser -- development

Google's move this week to make it easier for Chrome browser users to find "packaged apps," Chrome OS's souped-up Web apps, is part of its strategy to turn any Internet-capable device into a Chromebook wannabe loyal to the company's ecosystem, an analyst said today.

In a [Wednesday announcement](#), Google said that users of Chrome 28 on Windows, currently in the "Dev" channel, and thus the least-polished version of the browser, can locate packaged apps in a special section of the company's Chrome Web Store, the distribution mart for Chrome OS and Chrome (the browser) software.

Previously, users had to know the URL of a packaged app -- with that URL usually provided by the developer -- to retrieve it. Now the "Apps" category of the store shows only packaged apps to those running Chrome 28 on Windows.

Packaged apps are über-Web apps that are much closer to "native" software -- the kind written for a specific operating system, say Windows and its desktop -- that can run minus a live Internet connection and call on several Google APIs (application programming interfaces) and services barred to Web apps.

Written in HTML5, JavaScript and CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), packaged apps run in a stripped-down frame minus any of the "chrome" of a browser, such as the address bar, toolbar and menus, so that they look less like in-browser code and much more like a native application on Windows, OS X or Linux.

They can be set to run offline by default, take advantage of Google's synchronization architecture, and call APIs to access a device's hardware.

Google debuted packaged apps at 2012's I/O conference, and in February 2013, introduced the Chrome OS "App Launcher" -- a Windows Start button/menu-like program launch tool -- to the Chrome browser on Windows.

To Al Hilwa of IDC, the expansion of packaged apps to the Chrome browser is a clear signal.

"It looks like Google is defining the Chrome platform as what I'd call 'Web Platform Plus,' and intends for Chrome OS and the Chrome browser to be a 'platform on a platform' on any device it is permitted to run on," said Hilwa.

In other words, by extending capabilities once limited to Chrome OS, the browser-based operating system that powers Google's Chromebooks and those of its partners, to the Chrome browser -- which runs on Windows, OS X *and* Linux -- Google is slipping in a potential Trojan Horse that makes the native OS moot. If the same packaged apps run on a Windows 8 ultrabook *and* an OS X MacBook Air, the hardware becomes an ersatz Chromebook, all without Google having to make and sell the device.

"Packaged apps allow Chrome OS [and Chrome] to become richer platforms," argued Hilwa in an email Friday. "The approach appears to be about offline capabilities, which make Chrome OS much more practical and useful. To the extent Google is able to build a rich ecosystem of these apps, Chrome OS may encounter more success in the marketplace."

Google and its partners have had only limited luck pushing Chromebooks. According to Stephen Baker of the NPD Group, during March and the first half of April, Chromebooks accounted for 22% of sub-\$300 notebooks sold at retail in the U.S. Because the sub-\$300 category was 19% of *a*ll notebook sales, Chromebooks were responsible for just 4% of all laptop sales.

Google has promised to add packaged app discovery to the OS X and Linux versions of Chrome 28's Dev build. The [developer preview](#) of Chrome 28 can be downloaded from Google's website.

This year's I/O conference, scheduled for May 15-17 in San Francisco, will host at least two sessions on packaged apps, including a project status update on May 15 and [another on May 17](#) to show developers how to transform their Web apps into packaged apps.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.