

Ballmer Touts New Windows and Local R&D

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Among announcements timed to coincide with CEO Steve Ballmer's visit to Moscow, IT giant Microsoft said it would double its research staff at the Skolkovo innovation hub by 2015. **Sergei Porter**

Microsoft chief executive Steve Ballmer breezed into Moscow on Tuesday to hype mobile devices using the newest version of the U.S. software giant's operating system, Windows 8.

He met with Deputy Prime Minister Vladislav Surkov during his one-day visit to Russia and discussed the country's modernization and its further integration into the global economy, Microsoft Russia's press service said.

The two men also talked about the government's initiatives to develop the domestic economy and foster innovation, as well as Microsoft's support of innovative IT programs, scientific research and cooperation with the Skolkovo Foundation, according to the press service. Microsoft Russia president Nikolai Pryanishnikov also took part in the meeting.

Following the discussion with Surkov, Microsoft announced that by 2015 it plans to have doubled its research staff for the Skolkovo Innovation Center, the government's high-technology center taking shape at Moscow's western edge.

That was part of an agreement expanding the software giant's partnership with the innovation hub that Pryanishnikov and Skolkovo Foundation senior vice president Igor Drozdov signed Tuesday. There are currently more than 70 people working with Microsoft's research and development center at Skolkovo.

"Widening our cooperation with Skolkovo in the framework of the R&D center will allow us to tap the great potential of Russia to produce world class programming products," Ballmer said in a press release.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Microsoft CEO joined three other executives — Pryanishnikov, Mobile TeleSystems president Andrei Dubovskov and MTS marketing vice president Vasil Latsanich — to give a 10-minute presentation in the MTS store on Arbat.

The mobile operator is now selling a handful of smartphones and tablet computers with the Windows 8 system, with the first demonstration stand and sales happening at the prominent location.

With Windows 8, Microsoft is advancing its effort to compete for market share worldwide with HTC Android, which occupies 2nd place, and the market leading operating system from Apple.

Skolkovo Foundation investment director Alexander Lupachev said at a round table Tuesday that Skolkovo could become a special economic zone in three years and have "near British law," Interfax reported.

Round-table participants said that many foreign venture funds prefer to work within the jurisdiction of British law.

"There is a group of lawyers that is working on the subject of forming a special economic zone," Lupachev said. "Laws and regulations that will make it easier for foreign investors to work at Skolkovo should be adopted within three years."

He suggested that could address a current problem with the country's business environment.

"In Russia ... even when everything goes well, it is not easy and is often costly to navigate the chain of returning investment from the company to the foreign player," Lupachev said.

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