

Microsoft President on Micro-Hoo: We Can Do It

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We can do it. We can mesh our technologies and our cultures. And we'll keep the Yahoo name alive.

Those may be the highlights of a letter sent Friday to Microsoft employees by Kevin Johnson, president of the company's platform and services division, addressing his company's offer to acquire Yahoo. The letter, the first missive to employees to come to light since Steve Ballmer, the chief executive, wrote to them on Feb. 1, has no new information on the fate of the proposed merger.

But Mr. Johnson addressed several challenges that the companies will face if they indeed end up merging — challenges that have been noted by the press and analysts in recent weeks. "Both companies share a passion for great engineering, creativity, and development of services and technologies that truly can change the world," Mr. Johnson wrote. In other words, the Yahoo and Microsoft cultures are not that different. But, Mr. Johnson added, it may take time to fully integrate them: "Some aspects of the two cultures will naturally merge quickly and some will remain unique in the near-term and merge more slowly over time."

Mr. Johnson also said that one of the significant integration challenges facing the companies, their different technology infrastructures, was not insurmountable. Microsoft has already acquired companies based on open-source technologies, he said, and it hasn't always felt a need to migrate those companies to Microsoft technology. "We would work closely with Yahoo! engineers to make pragmatic platform and integration methodology decisions as appropriate, prioritizing above all how those decisions would impact customers," he said.

Mr. Johnson also said that Microsoft would retain Yahoo's brand and its large presence in Silicon Valley. And he seemed to suggest that mass layoffs would not be on the agenda. "While some overlap is expected in any combination of this size, we should remember that Microsoft is a growth company that has hired over 20,000 people since 2005, and we would look to place talented employees throughout the company as a whole," he said.

It might be reading too much into this, but Mr. Johnson seemed to be slightly more cautious than his boss, Mr. Ballmer. In his Feb. 1 letter, Mr. Ballmer said flatly that leaders from Yahoo and Microsoft "will work together closely on the integration process." Much of Mr. Johnson's message appeared to be predicated by an important caveat: "If and when Yahoo! agrees to proceed with the proposed transaction..."

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