



# First the Tick, Now the Tock: Next Generation Intel® Microarchitecture (Nehalem)

## **Introducing a new dynamically and design-scalable microarchitecture that rewrites the book on energy efficiency and performance.**

Since the introduction of Intel® Core™ microarchitecture in 2006 and its 45nm enhancements – the 45nm next generation Intel Core microarchitecture (Penryn family of processors) in 2007 – the blistering performance and energy efficiency of Intel microprocessors has delivered unprecedented capability to end users. Now in 2008, a new microarchitecture codenamed Nehalem stands to further build on these microarchitectural marvels, rewriting the book on processor energy efficiency, performance and scalability.

The first chapter is all about scalability. Next generation Intel® microarchitecture (Nehalem) is a *dynamically* scalable and *design*-scalable microarchitecture. At runtime, it dynamically manages cores, threads, cache, interfaces and power to deliver outstanding energy efficiency and performance on demand. At design time, it scales, enabling Intel to easily provide versions that are optimized for each server, desktop and notebook market. Intel will deliver versions differing in the number of cores, caches, interconnect capability, and memory controller capability, as well as in the segmented use of an integrated graphics controller. This allows Intel to deliver a wide range of price, performance and energy efficiency targets for servers, workstations, desktops and laptops.

To extract greater performance from this new microarchitecture, in targeted market segments, Intel is also introducing a new platform architecture: Intel® QuickPath Architecture. Through integrated memory controllers and a high-speed interconnect for connecting processors and other components, Intel QuickPath Architecture delivers best-in-class performance, bandwidth and reliability. In turn, it truly enables systems to fully unleash the new levels of performance that new and more powerful next-generation microarchitecture-based processor cores will deliver.

Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) marks the next step (a “tock”) in Intel’s rapid “tick-tock” cadence for delivering a new process technology (tick) or an entirely new microarchitecture (tock) every year. The first Nehalem-based processors are expected to release in the latter part of 2008. The family will grow to include server, workstation, desktop and mobile processors.

## **Unlocking All the Power of Intel’s 45nm Hi-k Metal Gate Process Technology**

Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) has been designed from the ground up to capitalize on all the advantages of Intel’s industry-leading 45-nanometer (nm) Hi-k metal gate silicon technology. This new process technology is one of the biggest advancements in fundamental transistor design in 40 years. It uses a new material combination of Hi-k gate dielectrics and conductors to enable Intel to continue record-breaking PC, laptop and server processor performance while reducing the electrical leakage from transistors that can hamper chip and PC design, size, power consumption and costs.

Intel’s 45nm Hi-k silicon process technology increases transistor switching speeds to enable higher core and bus clock frequencies and thus more performance in the same power and thermal envelope. This performance efficiency is helping Intel extend Moore’s Law (a high-tech industry axiom that transistor counts double about every two years to deliver ever more functionality at exponentially decreasing cost) well into the next decade.

## **An Overview of Intel's New Microarchitecture**

Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) is the next step in Intel's continuing success in leading the industry in processor performance and energy efficiency. In fact, it represents another big leap in performance and energy efficiency, similar to the leap made by Intel® Core™ microarchitecture over the first 90nm Intel® Pentium® M processors.

Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) continues Intel's philosophy of focusing on improvements in how the processor uses available clock cycles and power, rather than just pushing up ever higher clock speeds and energy needs. The goal is to do more in the same power envelope – or even reduced envelopes. In turn, like its Intel Core microarchitecture predecessor, next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) includes the ability to process up to four instructions per clock cycle on a sustained basis compared to the just three instructions per clock cycle or less processed by other processors. However, the next generation microarchitecture's biggest innovations come from new optimizations of the individual cores and the overall multi-core microarchitecture to increase single-thread and multithread performance.

The next generation microarchitecture's performance and power management innovations include:

- Dynamically managed cores, threads, cache, interfaces and power.
- Simultaneous multi-threading (SMT) for enabling a more energy efficient means of increasing performance for multi-threaded workloads. The next generation microarchitecture's SMT capability enables running two simultaneous threads per core – an amazing eight simultaneous threads per quad-core processor and 16 simultaneous threads for dual-processor quad-core designs.
- Innovative extensions to the Intel® Streaming SIMD Extensions 4 (SSE4) that center on enhancing XML, string and text processing performance.
- Superior multi-level cache, including an inclusive shared L3 cache.
- New high-end system architecture that delivers from two to three times more peak bandwidth and up to four times more realized bandwidth (depending on configuration) as compared to today's Intel® Xeon® processors.
- Performance-enhanced dynamic power management.

On the design side, next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) enables optimal price/performance/energy efficiency for each market segment through:

- Scalable performance for from one-to-16 (or more) threads and from one to eight (or more) cores
- Scalable and configurable system interconnects and integrated memory controllers
- High performance integrated graphics engine for client platforms

Let's look at how next generation microarchitecture's dynamically scalable and design-scalable directly contribute to power efficiency and performance.

## **Power Efficiency**

In the past, when a computer's energy efficiency wasn't a concern, nearly every architecture feature that could improve processor performance would be included without worrying about the power cost. But in an age of increasing concern for limited resources and increased energy costs, every segment (server, workstation, desktop and mobile) is power-constrained and designing a microarchitecture requires a different approach. Processor manufacturers must consider the power cost whether the processor is

intended for the home, data center, or ultra-light laptop. Consequently, Intel weighed every architectural feature added to the next generation microarchitecture against a strict power/performance efficiency threshold. If the feature couldn't add more than a one percent power gain for a less than three percent power cost, Intel wouldn't add it. By measuring the benefit of the performance gain against the power cost, Intel was able to design the next generation microarchitecture to deliver greater power efficiency at any power envelope.

### Performance Improvement Features

With the next generation microarchitecture, Intel made significant core enhancements to further improve the performance of the individual processor cores. Below we describe some of these enhancements.

**Instructions per cycle improvements.** The more instructions that can be run per each clock cycle, the greater the performance. In addition, in many cases, by running more instructions in any given clock cycle, the work task can complete sooner enabling the processor to more quickly get back into a lower power state. To run more instructions per cycle, Intel made several key innovations.

- **Greater parallelism.** One way to extract more parallelism out of software code is to increase the amount of instructions that can be run "out of order." This enables more simultaneous processing and overlap latency. To be able to identify more independent operations that can be run in parallel, Intel increased the size of the out-of-order window and scheduler, giving them a wider window from which to look for these operations. Intel also increased the size of the other buffers in the core to ensure they wouldn't become a limiting factor.
- **More efficient algorithms.** With each new microarchitecture, Intel has included improved algorithms in places where previous processor generations saw lost performance due to stalls (dead cycles). Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) brings many such improved algorithms to increase performance. These include:
  - *Faster Synchronization Primitives:* As multi-threaded software becomes more prevalent, the need to synchronize threads is also becoming more common. Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) speeds up the common legacy synchronization primitives (such as instructions with a LOCK prefix or the XCHG instruction) so that existing threaded software will see a performance boost.
  - *Faster Handling of Branch Mispredictions:* A common way to increase performance is through the prediction of branches. Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) optimizes the cases where the predictions are wrong, so that the effective penalty of branch mispredictions overall is lower than on prior processors.
  - *Improved hardware prefetch and better load-store scheduling:* Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) continues the many advances Intel made with the 45nm next generation Intel Core microarchitecture (Penryn) family of processors in reducing memory access latencies through prefetch and load-store scheduling improvements.

**Enhanced branch prediction.** Branch prediction attempts to guess whether a conditional branch will be taken or not. Branch predictors are crucial in today's processors for achieving high performance. They allow processors to fetch and execute instructions without waiting for a branch to be resolved. Processors also use branch target prediction to attempt to guess the target of the branch or unconditional jump before it is computed by parsing the instruction itself. In addition to greater performance, an additional benefit of

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increased branch prediction accuracy is that it can enable the processor to consume less energy by spending less time executing mis-predicted branch paths.

Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) uses several innovations to reduce branch mispredicts that can hinder performance and to improve the handling of branch mispredicts.

- **New second-level branch target buffer (BTB).** To improve branch predictions in applications that have large code footprints, such as database applications, Intel added a second-level branch target buffer (BTB). BTBs reduce the performance penalty of branches in pipelined processors by predicting the path of the branch and caching information used by the branch.
- **New renamed return stack buffer (RSB).** RSBs store forward and return pointers associated with call and return instructions. Next generation microarchitecture's renamed RSB helps avoid many common return instruction mispredictions.

**Simultaneous multithreading.** For next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem), Intel introduces an enhanced version of Intel Hyper-Threading Technology (HT), a technique used previously on some Intel® Pentium® and Intel Xeon processors that enabled a single execution core to run two threads at the same time. In a multi-core processor, simultaneous multithreading doubles the potential number of overall threads that can be run simultaneously by each of the processors. This means a quad-core processor could run up to eight threads simultaneously. What's unique to next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) is that its larger cache and larger bandwidth provide even more opportunities to take advantage of HT.

Incorporating simultaneous multithreading significantly boosts performance for very little power cost. It can deliver substantial performance (up to 20 to 30 percent<sup>1</sup>) depending on the application for only a slight amount of power. That makes simultaneous multithreading a perfect processor technology for today's power-constrained environments.

**Intel Smart Cache Enhancements.** Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) enhances the Intel Smart Cache by adding an inclusive shared L3 (last-level) cache that can be up to 8MB in size. In addition to this cache being shared across all cores, the inclusive shared L3 cache can increase performance while reducing traffic to the processor cores. Some architectures use exclusive L3 cache, which contains data not stored in other caches. Thus, if a data request misses on the L3 cache, each processor core must still be searched, or snooped, in case their individual caches might contain the requested data. This can increase latency and snoop traffic between cores. With next generation microarchitecture, a miss of its inclusive shared L3 cache guarantees the data is outside the processor and thus is designed to eliminate unnecessary core snoops to reduce latency and improve performance.

The new three-level cache hierarchy for next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) consists of:

- Same L1 cache as Intel Core microarchitecture (32 KB Instruction Cache, 32 KB Data Cache)
- New L2 cache per core for very low latency (256 KB per core for handling data and instruction)
- New fully inclusive, fully shared 8MB L3 cache (all applications can use entire cache)

A new two-level Translation Lookaside Buffer (TLB) hierarchy is also included in next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem). A TLB is a processor cache that is used by memory management hardware to improve the speed of virtual address translation. The TLB references physical memory addresses in its table.

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All current desktop and server processors use a TLB, but next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) adds a new second level 512 entry TLB to further improve performance.

**New Application Targeted Accelerators and Intel SSE4.** Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) includes all the additional Intel SSE4 instructions Intel included in the 45nm next generation Intel Core microarchitecture (Penryn) for faster computation/manipulation of media (graphics, video encoding and processing, 3-D imaging, and gaming).<sup>2</sup> In addition, next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) adds seven new Application Targeted Accelerators for more efficient accelerated string and text processing of applications like Extensible Markup Language (XML).

Application Targeted Accelerators extend the capabilities of Intel architecture by adding performance-optimized, low-latency, lower power fixed-function accelerators on the processor die to benefit specific applications. Such accelerators are the start of a natural evolution where gradually more and more advantageous implementations of fixed-function capabilities will be developed and added to the processor. Just as the evolution of silicon technology from 65nm to 45nm to 32nm enables more transistors for additional cores and cache, so too will it also enable more of these fixed-function on-die implementations. The benefit will be greater performance –and superior energy efficiency – for these specific applications.

The seven Application Targeted Accelerators included in the next generation microarchitecture provide new string and text processing instructions to improve performance of string and text processing operations. For example, they enable parsing of XML strings and text at a much higher speed. These Application Target Accelerators will be useful for lexing, tokenizing, regular expression evaluation, virus scanning, and intrusion.

**Improved virtualization performance.** Virtualization partitions a computer so that it can run separate operating systems and software in each partition, allowing one computer to act as many. Virtualization enables computers, particularly servers, to better leverage multi-core processing power and increase efficiency. Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) adds new features that enable software to further improve their performance in virtualized environments. For example, the next generation microarchitecture includes an Extended Page Table (EPT) for reconciling memory type specification in a guest operating system with memory type specification in the host operating system in virtualization systems that support memory type specification.

### **New System Architecture: Intel® QuickPath Technology**

With more powerful processors, a potential bottleneck can form anytime a processor or its individual cores can't fetch instructions and data as fast as they're being executed. Whenever this happens, performance slows. Of particular importance to the performance of a system is the speed at which a microprocessor and its execution cores can access system memory (in addition to internal cache). In multi-processor systems, not only is the actual access to data important, but also the multi-processor communication required to ensure memory coherency (also called snoop traffic).

For years Intel kept instructions and data flowing quickly to the processor through an external bi-directional data bus called a front-side bus (FSB). This bus performed as a backbone between the processor cores and a chipset that contained the memory controller hub and served as the connection point for all other buses (PCI, AGP, etc.) in the system. In turn, this has delivered industry-leading processor performance on the Intel Core microarchitecture family of processors.

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In its long-range planning, Intel has long anticipated that the development of a high performance, dynamically and design-scalable microarchitecture like next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) would lead to moving beyond FSBs to a new system architecture. The result was the development of Intel QuickPath Architecture, a new system architecture that integrates a memory controller into each microprocessor, dedicates specific areas of system memory to each processor, and connects processors and other components with a new high-speed interconnect. Previously referenced under the codename Common System Interface or CSI, Intel® QuickPath Interconnect unleashes the performance of Nehalem-based processors and future generations of Intel multi-core processors.

Intel QuickPath Architecture is a platform architecture that provides high-speed connections between microprocessors and external memory, and between microprocessors and the I/O hub. One of its biggest changes is the implementation of scalable shared memory. Instead of using a single shared pool of memory connected to all the processors in a server or high-end workstation through FSBs and memory controller hubs, each processor has its own dedicated memory that it accesses directly through an Integrated Memory Controller on the processor die. (For dual-core desktop and mobile processors, the memory controller will be implemented in the processor package.) In cases where a processor needs to access the dedicated memory of another processor, it can do so through a high-speed Intel QuickPath Interconnect that links all the processors.

An advantage of Intel QuickPath Interconnect is that it is point-to-point. There is no single bus that all the processors must use and contend with each other to reach memory and I/O. This improves scalability and eliminates the competition between processors for bus bandwidth.

Intel QuickPath Architecture is already receiving strong industry support. More than 10 industry leaders have licensed Intel QuickPath Technology and are developing innovative products.

### Intel QuickPath® Architecture Performance

Intel QuickPath Interconnect's throughput clearly demonstrates its best-in-class interconnect performance in the server/workstation market segment.

- Intel QuickPath Interconnect uses up to 6.4 Gigatransfers/second links, delivering up to 25 Gigabytes/second (GB/s) of total bandwidth. That's up to 300 percent greater than any other interconnect solution used today. (Gigatransfer refers to the number of data transfers or operations.)
- Intel QuickPath Interconnect's superior architecture reduces the amount of communication required in the interface of multi-processors systems to deliver faster payloads.
- Intel QuickPath Interconnect's tightly integrated reliability, availability and serviceability (RAS) features ensure high reliability. These features include:
  - Implicit Cyclic Redundancy Check (CRC) with link-level retry to ensure data quality and performance by providing CRC without the performance penalty of additional cycles.
  - Self-healing links that avoid persistent errors by re-configuring themselves to use the good parts of the link.
  - Clock fail-over to automatically re-route clock function to a data lane in event of clock-pin failure.
  - Hot plug capability to support hot plugging of nodes, such as processor cards.

### **Coming Soon to a Server, Desktop or Laptop Near You**

The next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) processor family and its Intel QuickPath Architecture will be available in new upcoming Intel desktop and mobile processors and Intel Xeon and Intel® Itanium® processor-based servers and workstation platforms. Developed as a design-scalable microarchitecture, next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) will enable Intel to rapidly tailor versions optimized for a wide range of price, performance and energy efficiency targets. This will make it easy for many users to take advantage of the many ways this microarchitecture dynamically manages cores, threads, cache, interfaces and power to deliver outstanding energy efficiency and performance on demand.

Next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) will earn another distinction in the 2009/2010 time frame. An enhanced version of next generation Intel microarchitecture (Nehalem) will be Intel's first microarchitecture used with our upcoming 32nm Hi-k metal gate silicon technology.

### **Learn More**

For more on Intel's 45nm Hi-k metal gate process technology, see <http://www.intel.com/technology/45nm/>.

For more on Intel QuickPath Technology, download the Intel QuickPath Architecture white paper at <http://www.intel.com/technology/quickpath/>.





<sup>1</sup> Source: Intel estimates based on internal measurements March 2008.

<sup>2</sup> For more on Intel SSE4, download the white paper, "Extending the World's Most Popular Processor Architecture," at <http://download.intel.com/technology/architecture/new-instructions-paper.pdf>.

All products, platforms, dates, and figures specified are preliminary based on current expectations, and are subject to change without notice.

All data is based on comparisons of engineering data sheets or measurements using actual hardware or simulators.

Intel® Virtualization Technology requires a computer system with an enabled Intel® processor, BIOS, virtual machine monitor (VMM) and, for some uses, certain platform software enabled for it. Functionality, performance or other benefits will vary depending on hardware and software configurations and may require a BIOS update. Software applications may not be compatible with all operating systems. Please check with your application vendor.