How Architecture Wins Technology Wars
Morris & Ferguson, HBR March-April 2000

TakeAway Points
Products of only modest capabilities can be the basis of architectural leadership … ‘good’ products don’t always win.

Good implementation can improve chances of establishing a standard by at least a factor of two

Successful architectures tend to be proprietary, but open

General purpose architectures absorb special purpose ones

Low-end systems swallow high-end systems
Architectural Principles

- Competitive success flows to the company that manages to establish proprietary architectural control – via one or more standards or interface protocols - over a broad, fast moving competitive space

- Architectures impose order on the system and make the interconnections possible
  ... Especially important in an open systems environment
  ... and are in the best interests of consumers

- Proprietary architectures are under constant competitive attack ... legislated standards usually settle to the least common denominator.
Architectural Standards Setters …

- Microprocessor: Intel
- Operating system: Microsoft
- Network system: Novell
- Printer page system: Adobe, HP
## Phases of Architectural Competition

**Commitment**
- provide structure to the chaos

**Diffusion**
- large profits come from broad franchises

**Lock-in**
- competitors trained to wait for the leaders next generation

**Harvest**
- the winner’s share of profits

**Obsolescence / regeneration**
- The better the architecture, the longer its lifespan
- but sooner or later, every architecture becomes obsolete
- and leaders often fail to cannibalize their old architectures
Architectural Competition

• The owner of the dominant architecture can subtly and precisely raise the hurdles - whenever a particular competitor begins to pose a threat – by modifying the architecture.

• ‘Point product’ vendors (e.g. Lotus) are always at risk when the architectural leader changes the rules of the game.

• IBM opened its architecture too broadly; Apple held its architecture too closed.