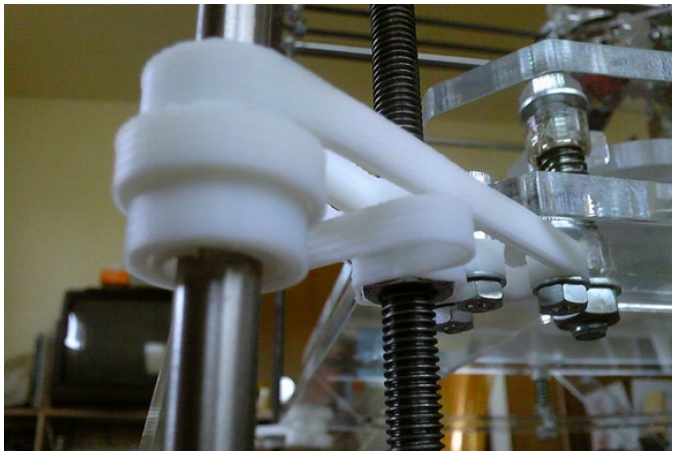
Written by Marco Attard
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At the annual HP shareholders meeting CEO Meg Whitman confirms the company is set to enter 3D printing space, with an official reveal to take place on June 2014.



According to Whitman the company solved what she says are the two main problems of the technology-- speed ("it's like watching ice melt" Whitman says) and quality ("the surface of the substrate is not perfect"). HP will initially target market verticals demanding systems for the creation of prototypes and finished products, but will also target service providers for consumers wanting individual print jobs.

Currently 3D printers are the domain of smaller vendors such as 3D Systems and Stratasys, so why would a giant such as HP want to take on the technology? A Canalys market forecast might have the answer. According to the analyst the 2013 global 3D printing market is worth $2.5 billion, and will rise to $3.8bn in 2014 before reaching $16.2bn by 2018.

The CAGR for the 2013-2018 period clocks at 45.7%.

“This is a market with enormous growth potential now that the main barriers to up-take are being addressed,” the analyst remarks. “Advances in technology are yielding faster print times and enabling objects to be printed in greater combinations of materials, colors and finishes. Crucially, prices are also falling, making the technology an increasingly feasible option for a broad variety of enterprise and consumer uses."

The analyst predicts printing-to-order services will drive short-term growth as penetration lags

technology advances. Meanwhile demand for custom products made possible by the technology will continue to grow, driven by customisation potential, convenience and manufacturing efficiency.

“We are at the inflection point for 3D printing. It has now moved from a new and much-hyped, but largely unproven, manufacturing process to a technology with the ability to produce real, innovative, complex and robust products," Canalys concludes. "Expect to see new major entrants making a significant impact in the industry in the coming years, including giants such as HP."

Go HP

Go 3D Printing Market to Grow to $16.2bn in 2018 (Canalys)