Safari or the risk of innovation
Sandra Sieber, IESE Professor

In a market clearly dominated by the Internet Explorer from Microsoft, the release of the Safari browser, exclusive for Mac, by Apple, must not be analyzed separately but within its strategy of maintaining a competitive position.

Over the last few years, the Cupertino based company has released some of the most innovative products in the personal computer and laptop markets. The recent presentation of the first 17 inch laptop of, and its complementary light 12 inch model, have demonstrated that Apple continues to be on the crest of innovation. The Mac OSX operating system has been well accepted and currently has more than 5 million users. According to Steve Jobs, 50% of the Christmas sales were to former Windows users. However, in the long term success will critically depend on the software available for these machines. And it is from this point of view that we must contemplate the release of Safari. Like other programs developed by Apple recently, it uses open source. In this way, Apple tries to encourage external developers to design software for Mac.

It’s far from the days when Apple cautiously closed its operating system to third parties. As everybody knows, the company paid dearly for that, with Microsoft becoming the indisputable leader in the operating systems and productivity tools market. Just now, with the vision aimed at an emergent market, digital lifestyle tools, Jobs’ company is focusing its efforts on offering to the end user not only the most appropriate operating system, but a suite of applications that allows it to move easily and quickly in the digital era.

The consecutive developments of iTunes, iMovie, iPhoto, iDVD and, more recently, iCal and iSync, are now complemented with the Safari browser, the fastest for Mac, and with some new characteristics, as the inhibitor of pop-up ads. They will be followed by Keynote, a presentation program that will allow the user to import and export Microsoft PowerPoint files, and that will support Adobe PDF and Quicktime formats, also being compatable with the rest of the Apple programs. It continues to be a risky bet but, is there any other way?