

Christmas mobile phone splurge not short on choice



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By [Jennifer Dudley-Nicholson](#) (</couriermail/author/0,23829,5000516-8362,00.html>)

November 11, 2008 11:00pm

NEED a new phone this Christmas? You're about to be inundated with options. From touchscreen wonders to phones with 8-megapixel cameras and something special from Google, jingle bells will not be the only thing ringing in the next two months.

And it's little wonder. Australians are well known for ringing in the new year with a mobile phone gift, with the lead-up to Christmas typically responsible for the highest number of handset sales all year.

Australians snapped up more than 1.3 million mobile phones last November, according to the Australian Mobile Telecommunications Association, and experts predict the credit crisis will not slow this trend in 2008.

Telsyte research director Warren Chaisatien says this annual mobile phone drive will not be quashed due to interest rate cuts and a tsunami of new high-end phones.

"The market is about to be swamped with devices, especially smartphones. Prices have come down and they are highly affordable."

Touchscreen in demand

Chaisatien predicts the trend started by Apple's iPhone 3G will continue, with touchscreen phones in high demand. About 150,000 iPhones have been sold in Australia, he says, and that figure could easily reach a quarter of a million by the end of the year.

Phone makers other than Apple are also likely to get a look-in with big names including RIM BlackBerry and Samsung poised to launch highly evolved touchscreen phones.

BlackBerry's touchscreen offering, the BlackBerry Storm, will be the company's first phone with a touch-sensitive screen and its first phone without a keypad.

The handset will feature a "clickable" screen that bends beneath each touch. Applications will include GPS navigation, a 3.2-megapixel camera and a fast 3.5G connection.

A Vodafone spokeswoman confirms the phone will be launched on November 21.

Samsung will also join the touchscreen pack this Christmas, with two touch-friendly phones launching.

The Samsung Omnia, released this week, is the company's most advanced touchscreen phone, featuring a 3.2in screen with haptic feedback, a 5-megapixel camera, GPS navigation, 3.5G internet access and the Windows Mobile 6.1 operating system.

Samsung Mobile marketing manager Jenny Goodridge says touchscreen phones are the next evolution in phone designs, following slider and clamshell forms, and can provide users with many advantages, including easy access to the web.

Samsung will also launch a Telstra-specific touchscreen phone called the F480 – a smaller handset with a 2.8in screen, 5-megapixel camera, Bluetooth and an MP3 player.

Camera power

But "touch" will not be the only word in mobile phones this Christmas. Australia will also get its first, second and third 8-megapixel camera phones.

LG will combine a touchscreen with a camera in its Renoir (KC910) phone due for release this week. The 8-megapixel camera phone will be equipped with face and blink detection, digital image stabilisation, exposure controls and the ability to capture video at 120 frames per second.

Sony Ericsson will also join the 8-megapixel crowd with its C905 Cyber-shot phone, unveiled in CommunicAsia earlier this year, which will have features including image stabilisation, face detection, GPS geo-tagging and photos that can be printed in A3 size.

Samsung will counter with an 8-megapixel camera phone called INNOV8 (i8510) that comes with a 2.8in screen, an LED flash and face, smile and blink detection.

Goodridge says the releases show how far camera phones have come, but warns potential buyers to test the cameras for quality and not to rate a phone's camera on megapixels alone.

Enter Google

But both touchscreen and camera phones will face another serious challenger this Christmas: one from internet leader Google.

Only one phone using Google's Android software is currently available, and only in America and on eBay, but Australian importer Ruslan Kogan plans to be the first to launch a Google phone in Australia and at a discounted price.

"We're aiming for a pre-Christmas launch on December 15," he says. "We have agreements with factories in China so we co-ordinate with them to create the devices. We were involved in choosing the hardware and the specifications and then they assemble it."

Kogan says the Kogan Technologies Google phone will be "less chunky" than HTC's Dream G1 phone as it will not have a built-in keyboard. It will feature a touchscreen "similar to the iPhone", GPS navigation with Google Maps, wi-fi connectivity, quick access to Google tools, including Gmail and Google Calendar, and applications different developers are making for Android.

Plus, Kogan says the phones will be much cheaper than touchscreen rivals.

"We're looking at selling it for less than \$200, so we're squeezing everything possible," he says. "In America, the HTC Google phone is selling for about \$US500 and on eBay it will cost you about \$1000."

Santa, it seems, will have plenty of choices.

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IN demand ... while Apple's iPhone remains popular, a host of newcomers equipped with touchscreens and up to 8mp cameras stand poised to challenge it for Christmas popularity.

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