

Mobile World Congress shows new directions for phones

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TOUCHSCREEN phones in every size, handsets powered by the sun, phones that withstand water and transform your travel or that can be transformed by electronic jackets; some so large they serve as laptops, others so small you can wear them as jewellery.

All of the above technology debuted inside a makeshift village in the heart of Barcelona last week, where thousands of gadget-lovers flocked to see what lies ahead in pocket technology.

While the ghost of Apple's iPhone haunted [Mobile World Congress](#) (<http://www.mobileworldcongress.com/>) – its handy touchscreen and application store mimicked by many – other technology took the mobile phone to new levels.

Like that 2-megapixel camera in your phone? What about a 12-megapixel snapper? Or an 8-megapixel camera with aperture control?

Appreciate the iPhone's unique finger-friendly operating system? Have you tried Microsoft's new Zune-like phone menu or Google's increasingly popular Android software?

Likewise, GPS navigation, QWERTY keyboards and even the shape of phones are on track to take a giant leap forward this year.

The Courier-Mail scoured Mobile World Congress for the most innovative, sophisticated, shiniest and lust-worthy developments to give you an idea of what to look for in your next mobile phone.

TOUCHSCREENS EVERYWHERE

IPHONE aftershocks were felt throughout Mobile World Congress, but none of its features had a bigger impact than its finger-friendly touchscreen.

Samsung certainly took this message to heart, with four of its five new phones replacing keys with large, touch-sensitive displays.

Samsung Electronics mobile communication head J.K. Shin hints there may be more of the same in Samsung's future, telling a packed press conference that "2009 is the year of the full touchscreen".

Samsung's new offerings include the Omnia HD, the first mobile phone to capture high-definition video (720p) that will also feature a LED-based 3.7in touchscreen, 16GB memory, GPS navigation and an 8-megapixel camera.

The Ultra Touch will also cram an 8-megapixel camera and GPS navigation into its 12.7mm-thin body, while two new Beat Edition phones – the M7600 and M6710 – use Bang & Olufsen audio technology, stereo speakers and MicroSD memory to deliver mobile music.

Many other major manufacturers also plan to join the touch-friendly crowd.

Nokia announced that its flagship touchscreen phone, the N97, will arrive earlier than expected in June, while LG will deliver a new touchscreen phone in its Arena model. The Arena phone, or KM900, will have a 3D interface, allowing users to flick through virtual photos and menu items, and will also feature a 5-megapixel camera, wi-fi, GPS navigation, and an 8GB internal memory.

GPS-maker Garmin also used the Congress to reveal its long-awaited range of touch-sensitive Nuvifone handsets created in conjunction with ASUS.

The G60 has a 3.5in touchscreen, turn-by-turn GPS navigation, 3-megapixel camera, 4GB memory and easy-to-use Linux operating system.

The Nuvifone M20 is a smaller, smartphone model that runs Windows Mobile 6.1 and also features Garmin's GPS technology.

Even traditional computer companies leapt on the touch-phone bandwagon at Mobile World Congress, with Acer revealing its first range of smartphones and Toshiba showcasing an upcoming 4in touchscreen phone.

Acer plans to launch four touch-friendly smartphones, including the M900 with fingerprint reader and slide-out QWERTY keyboard, the DX900 that can use two SIM cards at once, and the X960 and F900 with built-in GPS and 3.5G download speeds.

Toshiba revealed plans to launch a phone with the largest touch-sensitive display in the market. The TG01 will feature a 4.1in touchscreen, a faster than average 1GHz Qualcomm processor, GPS navigation, space for a 32GB MicroSD card and a profile thinner than 1cm.

A Toshiba spokesman said the phone would launch in the Australian winter and could feature Microsoft's new mobile phone software, Windows Mobile 6.5, at launch or as an upgrade.

INNOVATIVE PHONES

SEVERAL phones unveiled at Mobile World Congress were highly innovative, bordering on wacky.

Samsung, for example, followed its announcement of several sophisticated touchscreen phones with an eco-friendly handset that charges itself by sunlight. The Samsung Blue Earth phone is the world's first solar-powered full touchscreen handset. It features a body made from recycled water bottles, or PCM, and a back with solar panels that promise to "generate enough electronic power to call any time, anywhere".

The Blue Earth phone also features a built-in pedometer that will calculate the CO2 emissions users avoid by walking to their destinations, and an energy-efficient charger that uses less than 0.03W of standby power.

Another mould-breaking phone showcased at the Congress was the Modu, a basic mobile phone unit that can be upgraded by putting it inside an electronic "jacket".

First revealed at last year's Congress, Modu is a basic, palm-sized phone with just seven buttons on its face and a 2GB memory. But, when placed in one of its special-purpose jackets, the Modu can be transformed into a phone with a larger screen and full keypad, a camera phone, a digital photo frame, an exercise companion with pedometer, a music-friendly phone with JBL speakers, a car phone or a phone built into bicycle handlebars.

Modu strategic alliances director Sigalit Klimovsky says the different jackets "let users fulfil different needs" and upgrade the Modu phone quickly and cheaply; something that may appeal in

financially tough times.

Klimovsky says the Modu will launch in the second half of the year, though Australian operators might not offer the phone until a 3G version becomes available in 2010.

A company called Neo also unveiled the world's smallest fully featured mobile phone in the Neo 808i. This tiny creation is less than 7cm long and a touch over 4cm wide, and comes with a hook so it can be worn as a pendant

CAMERA CALLERS

SEVERAL makers were rumoured to be showcasing a 12-megapixel camera phone, but only one company came through with the goods.

The day before Mobile World Congress, Sony Ericsson portfolio planning head Steve Walker unveiled its upcoming 3.5in touchscreen phone with a 12.1-megapixel Cyber-shot camera on its back.

Nicknamed the Idu, the breakthrough phone is due to launch in the second half of the year and will combine its advanced camera and touch capabilities, letting users focus on part of a frame by touching it, for example.

While not reaching the megapixel highs of that phone, other new offerings are also focused on photography

Nokia revealed its most advanced camera-phone to date on the second day of the congress, the N86. The regularly sized slide-up phone features an 8-megapixel camera on its back, with Carl Zeiss lens, a sliding lens cover and a range of options previously found only in dedicated digital cameras.

Nokia N Series director Juha-Pekka Sipponen says the camera is the first to allow phone users to control the amount of light the camera lens lets in and also features a dual-LED flash, geotagging capability and 8GB memory with space for a MicroSD card.

"People demand mobile cameras that take excellent pictures in all light conditions," Sipponen says. "That's why the aperture of the Nokia N86 is comparable to that of a high-quality, stand-alone digital camera."

Samsung also added 8-megapixel cameras to two of its new touchscreen models, the Omnia HD and Ultra Touch phones.

SMARTER SMARTPHONES

SMARTPHONES, or phones that act as mini-computers, are expected to be in many more hands in future, having already multiplied by 40 times in the past five years, according to research firm Telsyte.

Phone makers are clearly paying attention to this trend, as many were on offer at Mobile World Congress including the world's toughest smartphone from i-Mate.

The i-Mate 810-F looks like a regular smartphone, with a QWERTY keyboard, large colour screen, Windows Mobile software, GPS navigation, wi-fi internet access and 2-megapixel camera.

But it is also waterproof, operating under up to 1m of water, will work in between -20C and 60C, is dust and dirt-resistant, and has survived being run over by a car and hit with a hammer.

A spokeswoman says the phone will arrive in Australia later this year.

Nokia also launched a new type of smartphone: the slimmest ever made.

Saying more people than just the US president need email on the go, devices executive vice-president Kai Oistamo launched the tiny E55, that features two letters on each button.

Nokia also launched a new version of its popular Communicator in the E75 – a smartphone with a QWERTY keyboard that slides sideways from beneath its screen.

NEW MENUS

MOBILE World Congress not only hosted new mobile phones but new phone software.

Apple changed the way its users interact with phones, letting fingers make selections, and several big players are joining the trend.

The biggest among them is traditional Apple rival Microsoft, with chief executive Steve Ballmer announcing the software giant would overhaul its mobile menus, and its image, this year.

Ballmer says the company will launch Windows Mobile 6.5 later this year and will be calling phones with the software simply "Windows phones" to tie them to Microsoft's main brand, and add a dedicated Windows-branded Home button to each.

The new Windows Mobile software is designed to be finger-friendly, easier to customise and feature more shortcuts so users can avoid delving into menus.

Microsoft mobile communications business general manager Scott Horn says phone fans will recognise some of the changes immediately, courtesy of a new-look Home screen reminiscent of Microsoft's Zune MP3 player.

"The Home screen is new, the Lock screen, the Start screen is new, the touch capabilities are new," Horn says. "We also bring a new version of Internet Explorer Mobile that uses the same browser engine as the desktop (version)."

Menu items and graphics are larger on the screen, the Start screen displays favourite programs in a honeycomb formation, and the software's Lock screen has miniature icons for alerts like missed calls.

Users will be able to zoom in on items by double-tapping them.

Horn says the new software will be finalised in the "next few months" and will be released on new phones later this year. Some phones supporting the software will include HTC's Touch Diamond2 and Touch HD, and Acer's Toshiba TG01.

Though Microsoft's software news grabbed most headlines at the show, Google also won attention for its phone software.

Its Android operating system won two new converts at the show, with HTC announcing plans for a Google-based model called Magic and Huawei showing off a non-working prototype of a touchscreen Android phone. Both will be launched later this year.

APPLICATION STORES

MOBILE phones are more entertaining if you can add web-friendly applications, programs and games to their menus.

More companies embraced this idea at Mobile World Congress, with Microsoft and Nokia announcing plans to launch mobile phone application stores this year.

Apple pioneered the idea last July with its App Store, which registered more than 100 million downloads in its first three months.

And it is a model that even Microsoft's Ballmer admits is successful.

"(Apple) have done a very nice job of making it easy to get at apps, paid-for apps, free apps," Ballmer says. "They did a nice job on that. They have a nice app platform, many of us do."

Far from reluctant praise, Microsoft mobile services senior director Todd Brix says he smiles "every time I see an Apple ad" for the company's phone applications. "Apple has done us a huge favour in helping people understand that applications are not just these little Java games," he says.

Microsoft's application store, called Marketplace for Mobile, will allow users to download applications directly to their Windows phone.

Horn admits this is something only the most advanced Windows phone users will have done in the past.

"We have, at last count, over 20,000 (third-party phone) applications out there but it's been sometimes challenging to find them," he says.

Microsoft's Marketplace will be made available to Windows Mobile 6.5 users later this year.

Microsoft also will launch a new automatic phone back-up service called My Phone that will give users the opportunity to store up to 200MB of their phone data, be it photos, contacts, text messages or calendar items, on Microsoft servers "in the cloud" for free.

Brix says the My Phone service will be useful to the millions of people who lose their phones each year as well as those who need to transfer data to a new phone.

But Microsoft and Apple will not be alone in this application store battle. Both will face competition from the world's largest phone maker, Nokia.

The Finnish company will launch its Ovi Store later this year and will take a different approach, executive vice-president Niklas Savander says.

"This store is different," he says. "It's not just a store to get applications from. It knows you. It suggests things you might like. It (uses) the location of the device and it shows you what your friends have bought. It's a smart store."

For example, an Ovi Store user who had just arrived in Barcelona might be recommended a Spanish translator, a Lonely Planet guide and local public transport information.

Savander says the Nokia store also differs in that it will be available to basic as well as advanced phones when it launches in May.

Ovi Store application makers already include MySpace, Facebook, Electronic Arts, Lonely Planet and Rough Guides.

Jennifer Dudley-Nicholson travelled to Barcelona as a guest of Microsoft.

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