

Now look what's in store

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By [Jennifer Dudley-Nicholson](#) (/couriermail/author/0,23829,5000516-8362,00.html)
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ONCE upon a time, mobile phones were used to make mobile phone calls.

Now you are lucky if you can find a way to phone a friend among menus urging you to surf the web, check your email, read the latest news and update the social networking website du jour.

It is a trend that has become more prevalent since the arrival of [Apple's App Store](#) (<http://www.apple.com/iphone/apps-for-iphone>) in July last year, which now offers more than 50,000 programs.

But the world's largest mobile phone maker, Nokia, is not letting its new rival run away with the market.

After launching its own application store, [named Ovi](#) (<http://www.ovi.com>), Nokia last week released the first phone with access to the store straight out of the box.

Nokia Australia general manager Emile Baak says the Ovi Store now has more than 20,000 applications.

"We think that Nokia is well-positioned to take leadership in this new market," Baak says. "We have the global reach and scale. We have over 1 billion global users."

Baak says the Ovi Store can now be used in more than 130 countries, including Australia, and by 75 Nokia devices.

Apple, however, is just as sure it will take its competitors a long time to catch up.

iPhone marketing executive Frank Casanova says Apple caught "the entire industry flat-footed" on phone apps.

"We thought: wait a minute," he says.

"All these apps are out there somewhere but they're not accumulated anywhere.

"Apple accumulated them and built a store around it. It's brilliant and it's as if no one had ever considered this."

Apple and Nokia are now competing with other big-hitting phone companies.

Google launched its [Android Market](#) (<http://www.android.com/market/>) in October while [RIM BlackBerry](#) (<http://www.blackberry.com>) currently offers applications for download outside Australia. LG and Samsung also plan to launch app stores outside Australia.

Gartner analyst Robin Simpson says the new players will have an uphill battle to defeat Apple's App Store, as the company not only had a headstart, but benefited from having just one phone form.

Simpson says Nokia has the biggest opportunity to challenge Apple's store.

"Ovi is the one with the most potential just because it has the biggest market share, even though Nokia has a lot of different models," he says. "Windows Mobile Marketplace doesn't have a particularly large install base and has a lot of different models and brands. And Android is only approaching 1 million devices."

But [Telsyte](#) (<http://www.telsyte.com.au>) principal analyst Warren Chaisatien says these stores are becoming an "increasingly important" consideration when buying a new phone, and their success could influence future sales.

"With every smartphone getting the same sort of features, consumers are looking beyond just the specs to see what else they can use the phone for," he says.

Connect signed up to the Ovi and the App Store to put the giants to the test.

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NEW HORIZON: The Ovi Store stand at the Nokia Connection conference in Singapore. / Agence France-Presse

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