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Blackberry strengthens, Apple soars, Microsoft weakens in smartphone market

by Peter Dinham

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Australian smartphone sales have seemingly proved recession-resistant, with the industry witnessing the 'stellar rise of new vendors', the fall of established ones, and carriers' role in content delivery being undermined by the mushrooming of mobile app stores.



According to the latest research by Telsyte, given the arrival of "the fourth screen" and what the firm sees as the "intensified battle in consumer cloud computing", the competitive landscape is poised to change yet again in the next 12 months.

Telsyte's Warren Chaisatien says that Apple, BlackBerry and Google's Android are expected to gain more ground while Symbian and Microsoft will continue to lose momentum. Chaisatien also says that, with smartphones now used by 16 percent of the Australian workforce and 12 percent of consumers, smartphones are projected to make up nearly one in every three mobile phones sold in 2009.

"About 40 smartphones will make their way to the Australian market this year alone, with almost half of those launched between now and Christmas.

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"BlackBerry's lead in the business market has strengthened notably, thanks to user confusion around Symbian's future directions and the exit of Palm and i-mate from the market. The biggest winner has clearly been the Apple iPhone, which, within just one year, has emerged as the country's second most popular smartphone, encroaching on Nokia's leadership in the consumer segment."

According to Chaisatien, the rapid growth of vendor app stores and greater availability of "over the top" content are bypassing mobile carriers' "walled gardens", slowly relegating service providers to "dump pipe" providers.

He also predicted that "mobile operators will be fighting back to put themselves in the picture again by introducing 'open garden' portals in the next couple of years, where content and applications are personalised and made user-relevant through network-based intelligence and billing relationships."

And, in another prediction, Chaisatien said that cloud computing will be the next battlefield in consumer IT, being fought across three screens – the PC, TV and mobile.

The race to win consumers' hearts and minds on the PC screen will inevitably impact their smartphone preference as convergence and interoperability become key, Chaisatien observed, adding that "as if three screens were not enough, Australians will be surrounded by 'the fourth screen' – a highly portable, wireless Internet-enabled tablet computer – in the coming year. Amazon's Kindle is just the beginning of a slew of new mobile devices to hit the local market next year."



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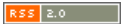


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Worldwide shipments of smartphones reached a high of nearly 40 million units in the third quarter of 2008, helping to grow the category by 28% from the same quarter last year.

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