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Android set to topple iPhone

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[iPhone](#) might rule the smartphone sector for now, but market researchers predict that the dominance of Apple's popular handset could be toppled by [Google's Android mobile platform](#) within three years.

The global sales forecast published by Gartner predicts that in 2012, [Android](#), [Symbian](#) (found mainly on Nokia phones) and Research In Motion (BlackBerry) will dominate the mobile operating system market, pushing Apple's iPhone OS into fourth position with a 13.6 per cent slice of the market.

"The iPhone is all about user experience but Apple can only produce a small number of handsets and not everyone wants an iPhone handset. They will remain strong but they won't take over world," said Robin Simpson, a researcher at Gartner.

Android, on the other hand, is expected to lift its market share from 5.1 per cent to 18 per cent, moving ahead of RIM (13.9 per cent) to sit below Symbian, which will lose some of its 48.1 per cent stronghold by 2012 to claim 37.4 per cent of the market.

Like Apple and RIM, Google's Android platform has a thriving marketplace of [smartphone applications](#), which is becoming a key differentiator within the mobile market, but it is yet to establish a dominant presence here with only 2-3 per cent of the market and only three Android handsets now available.

These are the [HTC Dream](#) and [Magic](#), and the [Galaxy Icon from Samsung](#). However, the stable is set to grow with HTC's new Hero handset due out this month and the Motorola Cliq is expected to ship before Christmas.

"Android has been around for less than a year and the user interface is not as fancy or sexy as iPhone, but we expect it to grow quickly with more and more hardware makers embracing it going forward," Warren Chaisatien, research director at Telsyte, said.

"We're excited to see just how far the platform has come in one year ... Android is now on over 10 devices in 26 countries with 32 carriers, in 19 different languages. As more carriers and handset manufacturers turn to open platforms, we anticipate this growth will only continue," a Google spokesperson said.

Growth in emerging markets is the key reason that Symbian and Android are likely to dominate the global market as handset makers there seek cheap, open platforms on which to develop products, Simpson said.

While Android has always been an open platform, [Nokia](#) has also opened up Symbian to third-party developers.

"There are dozens of Asian and Indian vendors that can address their markets with a cheap and cheerful operating system," he said.

While there is consensus among researchers that Google's Android is on the ascendancy, in other respects the Australian smartphone market is likely to defy global trends, Chaisatien said.

"We see three operating systems competing at the forefront in coming years. [BlackBerry](#), which is already very strong in the business market, has done a great job in terms of repositioning themselves to consumers. In number two position, we see the Apple iPhone, which has made significant gains in the market in just one year, and in third place we see Google's Android," he said.

While they will not disappear any time soon, Symbian and Microsoft are considered most at threat from Android and iPhone, and [Palm](#) recently pulled out of the local market altogether, proving how difficult it is to survive in the cut-throat smartphone world.

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"Once upon a time, Palm was very popular but it lost so much market share because it was not innovating quickly enough. It has pulled back to focus on markets where it has a strong presence," Simpson said.

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