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Google releases Nexus One smartphone, but no launch date for Australia

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Internet giant Google finally ended weeks of speculation overnight when it announced the launch of its first branded smartphone, the Nexus One.

But while the phone has excited the smartphone market as the first official Google phone, and possibly a competitor to the iPhone, it will only initially be available in the US, Britain, Singapore and Hong Kong.

No firm date has been given for an Australian release.

The gadget, which Google is calling a "superphone", is being sold online through a new Google marketplace. The company intends to add new devices to the online store in the coming months.

"The Nexus One belongs in the emerging class of devices which we call 'superphones'. It's the first in what we expect to be a series of products which we will bring to market with our operator and hardware partners and sell through our online store," the company said in a statement.

The gadget, manufactured by HTC, comes with a variety of features expected on a smartphone, including a 3.7-inch touchscreen, a 5-megapixel camera with LED flash, the ability to shoot MPEG-4 video and an option to upload videos to YouTube with just one click.

The Nexus One also comes with GPS features, a compass, stereo Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, a 3.5mm headphone jack, two microphones for "active noise suppression", light sensors and an accelerometer. It's also slightly thinner than the Apple iPhone 3GS.

It comes with a 4GB microSD card, with the ability for users to expand storage to 32GB. The phone only contains 512MB of internal storage.

The gadget's operating system is Android 2.1, which comes with a number of upgrades from the previous version. New features include five home screen panels for interactive wallpapers and widget icons, a new 3D photo gallery and an ability to synch with Picasa, Google's photo organisation software.

Voice recognition is also a big feature in the new phone, with the Nexus One able to dictate voice-to-text, as well as navigate the Google Maps navigation app with voice commands. The phone lacks a physical keyboard, with no multi-touch support, but it also comes with onboard speakers.

Like all Android-powered devices, the Nexus One will be able to use apps downloaded from the Android Marketplace. Additionally, new widgets included in the device can be configured to the user's liking.

One of the biggest draw cards for the device is its processing power. Google said at the press event the Nexus One was "as fast as your laptop from four or five years ago".

Google also introduced its new online store for mobiles at the press event, allowing users to buy the Nexus One in a contract or unlocked, meaning it could be used with any other carrier.

However, it warned that due to internal hardware configurations, users would not be able to use 3G features if the phone was using any other carrier apart from American telco T-Mobile.

The gadget is available for \$US180 on a two-year contract with T-Mobile, or \$US530 unlocked, contrary to a rumour posted last month stating the phone would be sold to Google account holders for just \$US100.

So far Google has not yet given details on an Australian release date, but it said it would launch the store and other devices for international markets in the coming months.

Many analysts have welcomed the new device, saying it could be the first device to compete with Apple's iPhone.

However, Telsyte research director Warren Chaisatien has said the Nexus is more likely to hurt Microsoft than Apple.

"I see this move as adding more momentum to the Google platform. Consumers are already open to Google technology, and primarily at the expense of Microsoft. Their share is going down, and I think if anything, Google's new phone will undermine already weak platforms... which includes Microsoft," Chaisatien says.

"I think this is a great addition to the product suite that consumers can already choose from. Back in 2009 we did quite a few studies showing the Google operating system, Android, is gaining momentum. There is definitely positive momentum for them on the smartphone front."

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