



 [Print this article](#) |  [Close this window](#)

Microsoft unveils game-changing Windows Phone 7

Asher Moses in Barcelona
February 16, 2010 - 7:05AM

Microsoft has moved from the backseat of the smartphone war to front and centre, unveiling a radically redesigned operating system that will soon become a serious challenger to Apple's iPhone.

At the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona today, the company showed off [Windows Phone 7](#) for the first time, which has been designed from the ground up to seamlessly pull together content from social networking sites and other web services on a scale unseen on competing platforms.

Previous Windows Mobile versions were scrapped to make way for a completely new design that integrates Microsoft's Zune music player and the Xbox Live gaming service.

Phones based around the new operating system are set to hit the market by Christmas this year. Samsung, HTC, HP, Sony Ericsson, Dell, LG and Toshiba have already signed up as early partners.

Analysts have said this could be Microsoft's last chance to claw back market share lost to competitors such as Apple, Google and RIM over the last few years. The iPhone has dominated Windows Mobile in the consumer market, while business users have turned to BlackBerry.

"They're in amongst the also-rans and getting less and so if they don't do something really drastic they're history in the mobile market," said Gartner analyst Robin Simpson.

Telsyte analyst Warren Chaisatien said: "I think it will be a make or break for Microsoft. A lot of expectations are being placed on it ... but the bar has been lifted higher and higher in the past 2 years!"

Reducing complexity

At the Windows Phone 7 unveiling today, Joe Belfiore, VP for Microsoft's Windows Phone division, said the explosion of applications and web services available on mobile phones meant devices had become far too complex.

He said phones had started to resemble PCs but "a phone's just not a PC - it's a smaller, more intimate device".

"We wanted a smart design that puts the user at the centre of the experience and moves beyond the phone as a PC-like item, that moves beyond separate applications and brings together some of the key things that are most important to people," he said.

"We wanted to design integrated experiences which become destinations for your most common tasks - things like pictures, and music and video and productivity - so that users have one simple place to go to access web services, phone functions and the data on their phones."

Five key hubs

Windows Phone 7 features a completely new interface, with a "start" page based around live "tiles" or, in Belfiore's words, "super icons". There are five main hubs representing the most common tasks:

People - Contacts from Outlook, social networking sites and web mail services are pulled, with thumbnail images, into one interface. People the user has recently communicated with rise to the top and for each contact the phone can display their recent activity on various social networking sites.

Pictures - All of the photos you've taken with the phone, synced from a PC or uploaded to social networking sites can also be viewed in a single interface. Photos uploaded by friends to their social media profiles can also be accessed.

Office - View and edit documents or make voice, text and picture notes.

Music + Video - Every Windows Phone 7 will essentially be a Zune music player, with users able to sync music and videos using PC software similar to iTunes. Third-party music and video applications such as Pandora are also integrated.

Games - Xbox Live is built-in and users can play casual games against people on other phones, on PCs or on Xbox consoles.

"We felt that we really had to evolve ... we really want to make sure that we are more accountable for the end-user experience," Microsoft's general manager for mobile for Asia-Pacific, Natasha Kwan, said in an interview.

Microsoft said a key priority with the new operating system was maintaining consistency in design. Each Windows Phone 7 device will have three buttons on the front - Start, Search and Back. The tile menu interface will also be virtually the same on all handsets.

Microsoft acknowledged that previous versions of its mobile platform focused heavily on business productivity applications. With the latest release the company wants to provide one device that can be used just as effectively for both personal and work tasks.

"We have rebooted the entire business; we had the operating system rebuilt from the ground up," said Kwan.

"With Windows Phone 7 series ... we're targeting people who have a very busy lifestyle and have a lot of other priorities besides work."

The built-in calendar pulls together appointments from both web-based personal calendars and from Microsoft Exchange, with work and personal appointments displayed in different colours.

Addresses and phone numbers are automatically hyperlinked and clicking on an address brings it up on Bing Maps.

In a demo of the search function, which uses Microsoft's Bing search engine, simply typing in "sushi" brings up all of the sushi restaurants in the user's immediate area and plots them on a map. From that screen the user can get directions, ring a restaurant or read reviews.

The web browser is based around the same code as the desktop Internet Explorer, and there is full support for multi-touch gestures such as pinching to zoom. But just like the iPhone, Adobe Flash support won't be present at launch.

Microsoft said it would reveal more details about the applications that will be available on the platform at its Remix conference later this year.

HTC chief executive Peter Chou said the company would launch a series of Windows Phone 7 devices this year.

"Microsoft has clearly listened to feedback from people and brought a new, fresh approach to the smartphone experience that is beautiful, powerful and compelling," he said.

Asher Moses travelled to Barcelona as a guest of Samsung

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/mobiles/microsoft-unveils-gamechanging-windows-phone-7-20100216-036t.html>