

## Google's Android for phones nears release

Open-source operating system to use 'market,' similar to iPhone App Store

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Google is everywhere, with its ubiquitous Web search engine, Google Maps for navigation, Google Docs online office suite, Google Checkout shopping and most recently, Google Chrome Web browser. Next up: Google's Android operating system for mobile phones, likely to debut in the weeks ahead.

The first mobile device built around Android will be carried by T-Mobile in a still-unnamed handset designed by Taiwanese smartphone powerhouse HTC. The Android phone will go up against Apple's iPhone, Research In Motion's BlackBerry and a host of devices powered by Nokia's Symbian and Microsoft's Windows Mobile operating systems. (Msnbc.com is a joint venture of Microsoft and NBC Universal.)

While every market Google has entered is highly competitive, none may be more so than the mobile phone market, specifically the market for smartphones, which can handle e-mail and Web surfing.

Symbian-based phones led in worldwide market share for smartphone mobile operating systems, with 57.1 percent of sales in the second quarter of this year, according to Gartner Research.

That likely reflects Nokia's status as the world's largest cell-phone maker. Next in line were Research In Motion, 17.4 percent; Windows Mobile, 12 percent; Linux, 7.3 percent; Apple's Mac OS X, 2.8 percent; and Palm, 2.3 percent. Another 1.1 percent included Sharp Sidekick devices based on the Danger platform.

In the United States, Research In Motion's mobile operating system dominates the smartphone market, with 41 percent, according to a February 2008 report by Canalys consulting, with Apple capturing 28 percent, Windows Mobile, 21 percent, and Palm, 9 percent.

### Open Handset Alliance backing

While it's Google that's putting together Android, it's also the culmination of work by the Open Handset Alliance, a collaborative group including Google and more than 30 semiconductor and software companies, mobile operators and handset manufacturers. Alliance members include Sprint Nextel, T-Mobile, Intel, Motorola, HTC, eBay, LG and Samsung.

Jason Mackenzie, vice president of HTC America, which uses Windows Mobile in its other phones, is confident about Android's prospects.

"Millions of people rely on Google services and applications every day on their PCs — whether it's for search, maps, e-mail," he said. "We believe that the ability to provide this same rich experience on a mobile device is a powerful proposition for a wide range of consumers."

While Android is an operating system, it is also an open-source system similar to Linux, upon which it is based. That's creating a lot of excitement and interest in the kind of programs that will be available for users, including one that can track family members' whereabouts in an emergency to another that offers a short cooking video, followed by information on nearby grocery stores that carry the ingredients needed for the recipe.

Since its inception, Android has been tweaked and built upon freely by developers, device designers and wireless carriers who have had complete access to Android's Software Developer Kit. Basically, Android is whatever users and developers want it to be.

That's in contrast to Apple's approach with the iPhone. Nine months ago, Apple created a Software Developer Kit offering application makers the same interface and tools Apple uses to develop iPhone

software.

But Apple has closely regulated and monitored every program that is being offered through the company's online App Store.

Android will "create a new, attractive environment to foster innovation and make it easier to bring new ideas to market, ultimately ensuring consumers a richer, more personalized mobile experience," said Mackenzie.

### **Android Market**

Beyond the touchscreen and customizable home page of an Android device is what will be known as the Android Market for add-on software. After all, a smartphone, just like any computer, is only as useful and engaging as the programs it runs.

On the face of it, it sounds like Apple's App Store, which has both free and paid programs. But in an Aug. 28 post on the [Android Developers blog](#), Google's Mobile Platform Program Manager Eric Chu touched on some of the differences.

"Developers will be able to make their content available on an open service hosted by Google that features a feedback and rating system similar to YouTube," he wrote. "We chose the term 'market' rather than 'store' because we feel that developers should have an open and unobstructed environment to make their content available."

Francesco Roveta, director of eBay Mobile, is not concerned about a lack of quality control in an open Android Market.

"eBay's experience with marketplaces demonstrates that end-users always determine the success of an application, a business model and a platform," he said.

"A compelling user experience will accelerate the adoption of those services and applications that are better designed, easier to use and provide a smoother user experience .... Applications that are not designed with the user in mind will rapidly fall into oblivion."

"The beauty of an open system is the ability to innovate without restrictions, and distribute applications without boundaries," said Gretchen Griswold, vice president of marketing for PacketVideo, which powers Android's media functions.

### **Android Developer Challenge**

To kick-start interest in creating programs for Android, Google announced it would award a total of \$10 million dollars to the top application developers in the Android Developer Challenge. The winners of the first phase of the challenge received awards ranging from \$25,000 to \$275,000.

The top 20 teams from the first phase of the [Android Developer Challenge](#) were announced Aug. 29.

Many of the winning programs were clever, practical, location-based services which use a combination of Web content and positioning information from a device's GPS radio.

The winning developers shared something else in common: They said their projects couldn't have been created on any other mobile platform, but were made possible because of Android's open development system.

One of the winning programs, GoCart, from Dallas, Texas-based developer [Big in Japan](#), is a personal shopping assistant. Once a product's barcode is scanned using the built-in camera in an Android device, the best prices from online and nearby merchants are retrieved.

Big in Japan also markets products for the iPhone, but GoCart was only possible for Android, said a company spokesman.

"We would like have liked to develop GoCart for the iPhone's 4 million active phones," said Alexander Muse,

chairman of Big in Japan. "But since (the Apple) operating system is closed, we still can't access various capabilities. The open source and process behind Android enabled us to create a fully functional application prior to testing on a real device. Completely amazing in our book."

### **A range of programs**

Another winning program, Locale, started as an MIT student project earlier this year, manages and changes settings, like volume, based on location. An Android device running Locale might automatically mute all sounds while close to work, and turn on the ringer at home.

"Android distinguishes itself by fostering an open environment," said Locale team member Carter Jernigan. "This forges a symbiotic relationship between Android and developers. Developers rely on the open nature of Android to make their applications possible, while Android's success with consumers will in part rely on the ingenuity of third-party developers to create applications, like Locale, that aren't possible on other platforms."

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the developers of Life360, another winning program, saw the need for a way to help families become prepared for and stay connected during emergencies.

The Life360 program lets users to create a single subscription to manage family GPS tracking, important document warehousing and emergency communication.

"The biggest advantage we get from Android is its always-on background network connectivity," said Chris Nulls, Life360's co-founder and CEO. "This is allowing us to build a truly real-time alerting and tracking system, which would simply be impossible using the iPhone."

Cooking Capsules, another winning program that is the brainchild of CEO and San Franciscan Mary Ann Cotter, is the product of an international crew of developers from across Europe and Asia.

Following the motto "watch, shop and make," Cooking Capsules presents a short video stream of a cooking show, identifies the nearest markets for the ingredients with GPS-enabled mapping and includes an ingredient checklist and recipe.

In a post on her [blog](#), Cotter shared her view of Android with a zeal typical of the platform's developers: "Android is a volcano. Not the kind that erupts suddenly like fireworks, but the kind that slowly releases molten lava that changes the entire landscape in such an unpredictable yet enduring way that no one realizes the impact until they look back at a snapshot from a few months or a year back to find the old way unrecognizable."

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