

Samsung seeks to wow mobile world with new smartphone

MADRID, SPAIN: Samsung aims to take the mobile world by storm by almost certainly unveiling a new Galaxy S5 smartphone with rumoured Apple-fighting features such as a fingerprint scanner and larger screen.



The Mobile World Congress starts next week in Barcelona. Image: Wiki Commons

The top smartphone company coyly announced to journalists an "Unpacked 5" event for the opening day of the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain due to be held between 24 and 27 February.

"We are holding a global launch event of our new flagship product," its invitation said, using a well-worn technique of not naming the smartphone so as to build anticipation.

The South Korean group sold 300m smartphones last year, 31% of the nearly one billion sold globally and double archrival Apple's 15.6% share, according to US technology research house Gartner Inc.

The Galaxy S5 is variously rumoured to have a fingerprint scanner on the home button; a 5.24-inch, full high-definition display; a water and dust-proof case and a 16 megapixel camera.

At the same time, the industry anticipates that Samsung will reveal the latest, possibly thinner, version of its smartwatch, the Galaxy Gear 2, after the first version failed to win over many users.

New smart device

It will be one of an array of new "smart devices" to launch at the show, analysts predict, as manufacturers seek alternative sources of revenue during a slowdown in the well-developed smartphone market.

A report by Gartner showed that the 42.3% surge in smartphone sales to 968m units last year was propelled almost entirely by developing markets such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

It said mature markets such as Western Europe and the US actually slowed in the final quarter of 2013.

Behind the glitz of the Samsung launch and its battle with Apple, which traditionally skips the show altogether, analysts point to two developments in the sector: the rise of big Chinese manufacturers, and the growing importance of Internet companies.

China's Huawei and Lenovo already held the number three and four positions for smartphone sales in the final quarter of 2013, according to Gartner, with their compatriot ZTE not far behind.

"Chinese companies are looking beyond their own borders to scale up," said Melissa Chau, senior research manager for the Asia Pacific at technology analysts International Data Corp.

Advertising and growth

China's Lenovo took a big step in that direction in January, agreeing the US\$2.9bn purchase of the loss-making Motorola Mobility from Google to grab a strong platform in the Americas and a foothold in Europe.

Facebook's 29-year-old founder Mark Zuckerberg is the star speaker in Barcelona, a reflection of the surge in advertising revenue it now captures from mobile users.

Microsoft, meanwhile, has agreed to pay €5.44bn for Nokia's loss-making mobile phone division.

"Suddenly, mobile is not this separate industry from the Internet and technology, it is part of the same mix," said Ian Fogg, senior principal analyst at research house IHS.

"We can see smartphones are now ubiquitous. We can see they are something consumers interact with throughout the day, wherever they are, including when sitting at the desk," he added.

"That is fundamentally different for media companies, for communications companies, for retail companies and for pretty much every blue chip that wants to engage with consumers."

Other new models

Besides the new Samsung flagship, a slew of other smartphones are set for release in Barcelona. Nokia is rumoured to be unveiling new devices including, ironically, a smartphone using a version of Android rather than Microsoft Windows in an attempt to capture sales in emerging markets.

Sony, too, may launch a new Xperia smartphone, the first new version of its flagship since announcing this month the sale of its stagnant PC business to focus instead on smartphones and tablets.

Taiwan's HTC, China's ZTE, Huawei and struggling US mobile maker BlackBerry are also expected to launch devices.

But the connected world is now moving well beyond mobile phones and tablets, as the "Internet of things" phenomenon hooks to everything from television sets to fridges.

Security provider Thinkpoint Inc. said last month it had uncovered more than 750,000 malicious emails from more than 100,000 everyday consumer gadgets such as home-network routers, multimedia centres, televisions and at least one refrigerator.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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