

## Microsoft's Window of opportunity?



**L**ast year, Microsoft launched its rebranded Windows Phone mobile operating system, in an attempt to regain ground lost to Apple and Android. We asked the industry if the PC giant can make an impact

With its dominance of the PC market and word processing tools, Microsoft might be expected to be the big player in the business mobile space. Yet the firm was completely caught out by its old rival Apple and new foe Google.

Late last year, Microsoft launched the rebranded Windows Phone 7 Series mobile operating system, in a bid to claw its way back into the mobile market.

Windows Phone was greeted with some excitement, but the OS lacked key features such as cut and paste and failed to gain traction in the market.

ComScore figures for Europe's five leading smartphone markets, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and

the UK, showed Microsoft's share of the mobile OS market slipping 4.8 percentage points, from 11.5 per cent to 6.7 per cent, between July 2010 and July 2011. In comparison, Apple increased its share slightly to 20.3 per cent while Android rocketed to the top of the rankings with a 22.3 per cent share of the market last July.

However, Microsoft is now poised to roll-out the latest update to the system, dubbed Mango, which is widely seen as the firm's real push into the market.

Though operating system refreshes always promise great changes, Windows Phone actually delivers a huge advance on its predecessors. The OS features an 'active tile' system which populates a handset's home screen with tiles that draw in data from other services. It also collates information about individual contacts, combining contact info, social media updates and photos in one place.

It also comes with a unified messaging system that is designed to bring together instant messaging, emails and other communication systems into one conversation, which can switch between different devices, in line with Microsoft's 'three-screens' strategy.

Microsoft has also paid attention to the mobile version of its Office productivity suite. Tight integration with the world's leading productivity software is likely to be an important selling-point in the business market.

Microsoft is also going to need to leverage the fact that around 90 per cent of the world's computers run the Windows operating system,

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### Integration

There are already rumours that the next version of Windows for computers, Windows 8, shares the same basic code with the next version of Windows Phone, also version 8, making integration potentially far smoother.

Yet, even with the advances made in Mango, and the potential synergies with Microsoft's other products, Windows Phone faces an uphill task.

Microsoft's time languishing at the bottom of the smartphone OS market has left the platform caught in a catch-22 situation. Without the scale of iOS or Android, it will find it hard to attract developers to make apps. Without apps, it will find it hard to attract the new customers it needs to build scale. Microsoft has been paying developers to build for the platform, but still faces a difficult task populating its app store.

Our panel also says that one of the firm's biggest challenges is in rehabilitating its name. Microsoft has been out of the running in the mobile industry for so long, that dealers will face a difficult task getting their customers to understand the offering.

### Partnerships

However compelling Windows Phone features are, Microsoft needs manufacturers to begin using it on high-quality devices.

The firm hopes its strategic partnership with Nokia will bring a whole swathe of Windows Phone devices to market, helping kick-start Nokia's business as well as Microsoft's.

Microsoft is also working closely with HTC, which has helped the first version of Windows Phone 7 make some ground. HTC recently announced two new smartphones, the HTC Radar and HTC Titan, which are designed around the Mango update.

Whether other manufacturers, many of whom have thrown their weight behind Android, are prepared to put the same effort into Windows Phone, and pay licensing fees to do so, remains to be seen.

We asked our panel whether Microsoft can finally make its mark on the smartphone market.

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