Finnish start-up launches smartphone to rival giants

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A group of ex-Nokia employees who quit over the company's decision to abandon the planned MeeGo operating system in favour of Windows presented their own smartphone on Monday, hoping to rival the sector's giants.

The Jolla smartphone, which is entirely intuitive and has no buttons, is "a strong candidate" on the mid- to high-range market, the Helsinki-based company said.

The model, which is so far just called Jolla, has a 4.5-inch touch screen and features two different-coloured halves that together make up the phone.

It is to go on sale in the fourth quarter, retailing for 399 euros ($513).

The company is profiling itself as a "different" manufacturer, and runs on its own operating system called Sailfish OS, a successor to MeeGo and which is compatible with some Android applications.

The company is offering Sailfish products to retailer and operator partners for the medium-price range.

According to Marc Dillon, head of Sailfish development, existing operating systems "do not really support a great deal of flexibility. One (iOS) is completely closed and one (Android) pushes its own services pretty heavily."

"I see that Sailfish will be used on lots of different devices from other manufacturers as well. We have a constant stream of interest," he told AFP.

Dillon said he would be "very happy with one million sold devices in one year."

Jolla hopes to take on markets in China, Europe and North Africa, but not the United States.

Mikael Rautanen, an analyst at equity research company Inderes, deemed the new phone's technical qualities as average but said Jolla's innovative strategy and moderate pricing may appeal to the public.

"If Jolla manages to sell two million phones in the year following the

launch, then we can talk about success," he said.

Smartphone operating systems are dominated by Google's Android and Apple's iOS. Jolla's Sailfish, like Microsoft's Windows and Mozilla's Firefox, are trying to break their dominance on the market.

Nordea bank analyst Sami Sarkamies was pessimistic about Jolla's chances of making it big as a smartphone maker.

However, "the platform (operating system) that they're developing has a lot more potential," he said.

Jolla has already signed two distribution deals, with the largest smartphone retailer in China, D.Phone, and the Finnish operator DNA.

The Sailfish OS will also run on tablets.

Jolla, which counts four former Nokia engineers and directors among its five founders, was started in 2011 and now has some 70 employees.

More information: join.jolla.com/en

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