

RIM Courts Broader Market with BlackBerry Curve

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Research In Motion is rolling out the smallest and lightest full-keyboard BlackBerry smart phone yet, a new multimedia-laden device aimed at broadening the market that it seeks to conquer.

Aside from all of the standard calling and wireless e-mail functions RIM's devices are known for, the new BlackBerry Curve comes with a

2-megapixel camera with 5X zoom, built-in flash and a full-screen viewfinder.

It lets users watch videos and play music like other BlackBerries, but also comes with an advanced media manager program and a photo editor as well.

The Curve follows on the success of the BlackBerry Pearl, which debuted last September to rave reviews and has sold very well for the Waterloo, Ontario-based company.

The Pearl, however, did not feature a full, so-called QWERTY keyboard which some users prefer.

"For those that were eagerly awaiting for a Pearl-like design with a full QWERTY keyboard, this is it," RIM co-Chief Executive Jim Balsillie said in an interview.

The Curve's bells and whistles are aimed at high-end customers who are willing to pay top dollar for stylish looking smartphones with multimedia capability.

While the Curve is still a device for professionals and so-called "prosumers," RIM hopes its heavy multimedia focus will broaden the market to high-end retail consumers.

Balsillie and RIM did not announce a price for the Curve, but the device is expected to be available for around \$200 through carriers around the globe.

While the BlackBerry has become a staple among lawyers, politicians, business executives and other professionals, it has yet to penetrate the retail consumer market to the same extent.

One key hurdle for widening the audience for the BlackBerry has been its price, as a fully-loaded smartphone with wireless e-mail capability is much more expensive than most cellphones available on the market today.

However, that is beginning to change, Balsillie said, with some plans for the BlackBerry now offering the device for free or for less than \$100.

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