

Global crisis hits smartphone sales

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US-based Gartner said an estimated 38.14 million smartphones -- mobile phones with multi-media functions -- sold in the three months to December, an increase of 3.7 percent over the same period in 2007.

It was the slowest rise since Gartner began tracking the market for smartphones in 2003, its London-based research director Roberta Cozza

told AFP.

Total [smartphone sales](#) in 2008 reached 139.3 million units, up almost 14 percent over the previous year, the research firm said in a report received here.

"After a strong third quarter with [new product introductions](#)... the worsened [economic climate](#) continued to make data plans associated with smartphones out of reach for most consumers," said Cozza, Gartner's research director.

The lack of attractive devices launched during the December quarter also affected sales, she said.

Within the Asia-Pacific region, sales fell 4.6 percent in 2008 from the previous year to 28.1 million units, Cozza said. In North America, 2008 sales grew 69 percent to 35.8 million units.

Finland's Nokia, regarded as a bellwether for the industry, was the only major phone vendor to see sales fall during the [fourth quarter](#) while its closest rivals made gains, said Gartner.

The number one smartphone seller suffered a 16.8 percent drop in sales during the December quarter. Nokia sold 60.9 million devices over the year as its [market share](#) dropped to 43.7 percent, the research firm said.

Canada's Research in Motion, maker of the popular Blackberry, ranked second in 2008 sales moving 23.14 million units at 16.6 percent of the market.

California-based Apple was the third-biggest player with iPhone sales of 11.42 million units, more than triple the 3.3 million sold when it launched the device in 2007.

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