

# RIM unleashes BlackBerry Torch to take on iPhone

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The new BlackBerry Torch is displayed during a product introduction, Tuesday, Aug. 3, 2010, in New York. (AP Photo/Richard Drew)

Research In Motion (RIM) on Tuesday unveiled a BlackBerry Torch to take on the hot-selling iPhone, avoiding comment on a plan in the United Arab Emirates to snuff out data service there.

RIM's first mobile phone with a slide-out keyboard and touch-control screen debuted at a press event in New York City.

RIM executives did not make themselves available after the gathering to

field questions about discussions said to be taking place between countries such as the UAE regarding access to data sent using BlackBerry devices.

While the popularity of iPhones has soared among fans thrilled by games, social networking, video watching and other casual uses, BlackBerry has remained a favorite for business people craving secure wireless communications.

BlackBerry smartphones can be hard targets for countries that do electronic snooping in the name of national security.

The UAE has said that BlackBerry services including messenger, Web browsing and email will be suspended on October 11 because they "allow individuals to commit violations" that the country cannot monitor.

In an emailed statement on Monday, RIM said it was aware some customers were "curious about the discussions that occur between RIM and certain governments" but that such talks were confidential.

BlackBerry security is designed to let business users "transmit information wirelessly while also providing them with the necessary confidence that no one, including RIM, could access their data," RIM said.

In an increasingly crowded smartphone market, the Torch debuted with US telecom giant AT&T, the exclusive service provider for iPhone handsets from California-based Apple.

Torch will be released in the United States on August 12 and will be priced at 199 dollars with a two-year service contract with AT&T, which will subsidize the cost of the hardware.

Torch did not sacrifice the keyboard, a popular feature among business people rely heavily on email and text messages. The handset also has an improved camera.

"With the legendary BlackBerry keyboard you love accompanying a large touch screen, users now have the best of both worlds," RIM said in a release. "A refined smartphone designed for the heart and the head."

Torch handsets are more powerful than their predecessors and run on a new BlackBerry 6 operating system. Features touted by RIM included "universal search" that automatically scours all applications on a Torch smartphone for chosen keywords.

Despite the announcement, the company's stock price was down nearly three percent to 55.49 dollars as the end of the trading day neared in New York.

Along with the problem in the UAE, investors were worried about tough competition from iPhones and smartphones using the Android operating system developed by Google.

BlackBerry remains the most popular smartphone in the US market but figures released this week by Nielsen indicate its dominance is eroding and that ranks of its users covet iPhones or Android handsets.

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