

New mobiles have gadgets for the elderly

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Mobiles phones by Austrian group Emporia are displayed at the 3GSM World congress in Barcelona on February 17. As the mobile world booms with complex technological smartphones and tablets, two rival firms are carving up a growing but largely ignored market for the elderly.

As the mobile world booms with complex technological smartphones and tablets, two rival firms are carving up a growing but largely ignored market for the elderly.

Their priority is not so much to zip their users from the Internet to Facebook or from MP3 songs to photos and videos.

Instead, the gadgets they pack into their phones include a night torch that also flashes when the phone rings, or a pull-out pad for writing down notes with an actual, real pen.

"In Spain, France, Britain or Italy, there are 10 to 15 million people aged

60 or more," said Christophe Yerolymos, head of Austrian group Emporia's French subsidiary.

"Of these 15 million, about half don't use mobile phones," he added.

Even among the half that do, nearly two-thirds had devices that were not appropriate for their needs, he said at his stand in the mobile industry's annual congress in Barcelona.

Emporia, celebrating its 20th anniversary, and the Swedish group Doro, which launched mobiles for seniors in 2007, share a market which is otherwise mostly ignored.

Their phones have the same size and styling of other mobiles but with more readable screens, larger buttons and compatibility with [hearing aids](#)

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The market is not exactly overcrowded with only two companies, said Yerolymos, although Britain's [Vodafone](#) made an attempt with mixed success in the mid-2000s with its Vodafone Simply.

Emporia's customers are dynamic people who surf the Internet but mostly from home, Yerolymos said.

The Austrian business, which offers mobiles for 50 to 100 euros (\$70-140), expects to move one million devices between 2010 and 2011, and twice that in the following year.

Doro boasts of 1.2 million sales since 2007.

Focussed more on health, Doro offers two models -- the Easy, which is a lot like the simple-to-use Emporia phones; and the Plus, which has four buttons, A, B, C, and D with memorized numbers along with an SOS

button.

Ryan Trendell, head of Doro's British business said the Plus was "very specialised, very, very easy to use. Maybe for someone who is 80, 90, maybe someone suffering with dementia or loss of memory."

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