Android smartphones winning over 'app' makers

May 1 2011, by Glenn Chapman

This file photo shows Google's Nexus One (L) smartphone with service provider from T-Mobile and the Apple iPhone (R), with provider service from AT&T. Google is the new darling of software wizards out to cash-in on the world's love for customizing smartphones with fun, hip or functional applications.

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Developers once obsessed with "apps" for Apple's hot-selling iPhones are touting creations tailored for smartphones built on the Google-backed Android platform.

"In the past seven months, Android has become the de facto second platform out there that people are developing for," AppNation chairman Drew Ianni told AFP during the gathering of software entrepreneurs this week in San Francisco.

"I think there is a general wait-and-see interest regarding platforms outside of Apple iOS and Android," he added.

Mobile platforms being watched by developers include [BlackBerry](link), Microsoft Windows Phone 7 and Hewlett-Packard's webOS.

Ianni expected smartphones based on Microsoft or HP software to increase in allure as they gain traction in the market.

"We need a third platform that is viable, otherwise it is going to be the Android show," Urban Airship chief executive Scott Kveton said after taking part in an AppNation panel.

"Android is growing at a phenomenal rate," he continued. "I'm afraid it is going to be Android running away with it."

Urban Airship provides tools that help developers make money from [smartphone](link) programs. Early in April the Oregon-based company added a feature allowing people to make purchases inside Android applications.

"Increasingly, people are finding it a good investment to build for Android and build for tablets and we are trying to support them," [Google](link) director of mobile Americas Jason Spero said after an on-stage chat at AppNation.

Android's share of the US smartphone market has surged this year while BlackBerry's sunk, according to recent figures from industry tracker comScore.

Android commanded a third of the market, while BlackBerry ranked second with 29 percent and Apple third with 25 percent, comScore reported.

"Almost everyone developing for iPhone has moved on to Android," said Mario Tapia, director of mobile products at application store GetJar and coordinator of a Mobile Mondays social group for developers in Silicon Valley.

"At the end of the day, it is about distribution," he added. "You move to where the audience is."

Apple had slightly more that 333,000 iPhone applications in its App Store in March, but Google's Android Market boasted 206,000 "apps" and was growing fast, according to figures from industry tracker Distimo.

"The Android Market is going to take over as biggest application store in terms of quantity of apps in about five months," Distimo researchers concluded.

Distimo predicted that Apple's App Store would be relegated to second place, followed by Windows Phone 7 Marketplace and BlackBerry App World.

Windows Phone 7 Marketplace had about 12,000 applications in March while Nokia Ovi Store had 30,000 and BlackBerry had 27,000, according to Distimo.

Distimo expected Windows 7 Marketplace to leap ahead of BlackBerry and Ovi by October.

"If Apple has 150 million iOS devices out there it is almost a no-brainer,

you write for iOS," said analyst Tim Bajarin of Creative Strategies.

"You see Android coming up the line, and that is almost a no-brainer," he continued. "Where it becomes tougher is making the next step to go after webOS or BlackBerry or whatever with limited money and talent."

Independent application operations typically have only a few, if not just one, software developer, according to Bajarin.

Finding ways to get noticed and make money in a sea of more than 600,000 smartphone applications were hot topics at AppNation.

Attendance at the event grew to 1,700 this year from 1,100 at its premier in San Francisco last year. The number of exhibitors grew to 210 from 80.

Opera Mobile Store that spans more than 200 countries launched an "Appcelerator" program at AppNation to help developers promote and profit from software creations.

"The apps here are great," said Opera Software consumer mobile executive vice president Mahi de Silva. "You are seeing the tip of the iceberg in innovation."

Advertisers are increasingly tuning into the potential to target consumers on smartphones and tablet computers.

"There is no question that ultimately, this is probably the most powerful vehicle for ads that we've ever had," Bajarin said. "Television was obviously significant but if I can do location-based services tied to ads this changes the dynamics of advertising completely."

Mobile ads are more effective for advertisers and can translate into more

money for developers, according to Lisa Abramson, director of marketing at mobile video ad network Rhythm New Media.

"Consumers love free and the best way to monetize that is through advertising," Abramson said.

Developers can also make money from in-application transactions, selling virtual goods, or simply charging for software.

"It becomes a collage of monetization mechanisms," Spero said. "Each developer has to be an expert on what their audience has a tolerance for."

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Citation: Android smartphones winning over 'app' makers (2011, May 1) retrieved 23 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2011-05-android-smartphones-app-makers.html