

China's Alibaba to launch mobile operating system

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The group will also unveil its first smartphone at the launch, to be held next week in Beijing, [Alibaba](#) spokeswoman Florence Shih told AFP by telephone from Hong Kong.

The smartphones, expected to cost between 2,000 yuan (\$309) and 3,000 yuan, will offer a number of "cloud applications" along with pre-installed mapping and [instant messaging software](#), she added.

Cloud services allow users to access applications or store their data on remote servers instead of on their personal computers or handsets.

Sales of smartphones in China grew to 19.91 million units in the first quarter of 2011, up 4.8 percent from the previous quarter, according to Beijing-based research firm Analysys International.

However, industry experts expressed scepticism about the prospects for a new entrant to an already crowded market dominated by Google's Android operating system, Apple's iOS and the Symbian platform developed by Nokia.

"It would be challenging for the smaller operating systems to expand in a quite stable market at this moment," said Li Muzhi, a Hong Kong-based analyst with Mizuho Securities.

"If they (Alibaba) want to be successful, they have to make it an [open platform](#) and have some features that not only benefit the users but benefit the manufacturers."

Alibaba said its smartphones would be made by domestic handset maker Beijing Tianyu [Telecommunications Equipment](#) Co and powered by chips from US tech giant Nvidia.

The company is also in talks with manufacturers to develop tablets with the mobile operating system, spokeswoman Shih said, without disclosing the identities of the company's potential partners.

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