

Chinese firm Alibaba announces new smartphone OS - Aliyun

July 29 2011, by Bob Yirka

Alibaba Group, a Chinese e-commerce company has announced the development of a new OS for smartphones; called Aliyun, it will initially run on the K-Touch Cloud-Smart Phone W700, built by Beijing Tianyu Communications, a Chinese handset maker.

The company has said it developed the new operating system over a three-year period, employing over 1,200 engineers in the process and is licensing the new OS for free.

China is currently considered to be one of the most wide open smartphone markets at this time due to the installed base of some 800 million [cell phone users](#), very few of which have made the jump to smartphones. Despite the fact that [Apple's](#) iPhone and phones running Google Android have a huge head start, [Alibaba](#) believes that it can surpass the foreign competition by offering users cloud based apps on the phone, rather than forcing them to go to a store, buy an app and download it (though it will also run Android apps and Web-based apps built with HTML 5 or JavaScript).

In addition to standard features, such as cloud-based e-mail, internet search, weather and mapping and GPS navigation, Alibaba will offer, at least initially, mostly e-commerce apps, such as a barcode scanner to find products online or an app that lists group discounts, etc., which it will be well positioned to support since Alibab Group also owns and operates Taobao Mall and Taobao Marketplace, who with around 370 million users, are two of China's largest online retailers.

The new smartphone OS will put Alibaba in direct competition with Google and Apple, but company executives say they are confident that focusing on cloud based apps will make their phone a superior choice. Also the company has been watching the ongoing battle between Google and the Chinese government; one that could eventually leave Google out of the market altogether if it's not careful; and what a huge prize that would be, as forecasters expect some 95 million smartphones will be sold in China this year alone.

Alibaba executives also say they will be able to sell their phones at a more affordable price than outside competitors, because of lower domestic costs and is currently negotiating with Qualcomm to build a lower-end, even less expensive smartphone that would also of course run the Aliyun OS.

The initial demo phone ran a Linux variant, but Alibaba says a K-Touch [phone](#) running Aliyun will be ready for sale in China sometime next month with a tablet coming shortly thereafter. And after that, executives hint that they fully expect to sell products outside of China as well, something that will most definitely get Apple and Google's attention.

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