

Nokia unveils Windows smartphones to catch rivals

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Nokia's Vice President of Marketing Blanca Juti shows off two new mobile phones, the Asha 210, left, and the Asha 200, during the Nokia World 2011 at the ExCeL ICC center in London, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2011. The new Asha range, priced at euro60 to euro115, some with twin SIM cards, music features, interactive maps and the popular Angry Birds game pre-loaded, will be shipped globally in the fourth quarter or early 2012. (AP Photo/Sang Tan)

Nokia Corp. on Wednesday launched its long-awaited first Windows cell phones, hoping to claw back market share it has lost in the tough, top-end smartphone race to chief rivals, Apple Inc.'s iPhone, Samsung and Google's Android software.

But some analysts say it may be too little, too late, for the world's top mobile phone maker.

With price tags of euro420 (\$580) and euro270, the Lumia 800 and 710 are based on Microsoft Corp.'s Windows 7 software and come eight months after Nokia and the computing giant said they were hitching up.

"Lumia is reasonably good ... but it's not an iPhone killer or a Samsung killer," Neil Mawston from Strategy Analytics said. "But where Nokia does stand out is on their price - it looks like they are going to be very competitive."

Lumia 800, with Carl Zeiss optics and 16GB of internal memory, will be available in selected European countries in November, including France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Britain. It will be sold in Hong Kong, India, Russia, Singapore and Taiwan before the year-end.

Lumia 710, with a 1.4 GHz processor, navigational applications and Nokia Music - a free, mobile music-streaming app - will first be available in Hong Kong, India, Russia, Singapore and Taiwan toward the end of the year.

The company's share price jumped almost 3 percent to euro4.96 (\$6.90) in otherwise depressed market in Helsinki.

Nokia also unveiled four cheaper smartphones aimed at emerging markets - the Asha range priced euro60 to euro115 - with cameras, navigation applications and fast downloads - in a bid to help "the next billion" users connect to the Internet, Nokia CEO Stephen Elop said at the Nokia presentation in London.

Equipped with QWERTY keyboards and some with the popular dual SIM cards, the Asha handsets will be shipped globally in the fourth quarter or early 2012.



President and CEO of Nokia, Stephen Elop shows off the new Nokia Lumia 800 smartphone during the Nokia World 2011 at the ExCeL ICC center in London, Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2011. (AP Photo/Sang Tan)

Nokia, which claims 1.3 billion daily users, has steadily been losing ground in smartphones, squeezed in the low end by Asian manufacturers like ZTE and in the high end by the iPhone, Research in Motion's Blackberry, Korea's Samsung Electronics and Taiwan-based HTC Corp.

The iPhone has set the standard for smartphones among many design-conscious consumers, the Blackberry has been the favorite of the corporate set and increasingly Google Inc.'s Android software has emerged as the choice for phone makers that want to challenge the iPhone.

Samsung and HTC - snapping at Nokia's heels for third place in top-end smartphones behind the iPhone and Samsung - are the biggest users of the Android platform.

Nokia is still operating Symbian software, older than Apple's software and considered clumsy by many, although it has been upgraded. Nokia also introduced the MeeGo platform in its flagship N9 model launched last month.

Elop has said Windows software will become the cell phone maker's main platform but that Nokia won't stop developing Symbian or MeeGo.

Mawston says Nokia has been pushed into a corner as Symbian was unable to compete with other operating systems and MeeGo took too long to develop.

"It's a risk that they may be juggling too many balls at once," Mawston said. "They were pushed into a multi-platform strategy for at least the short-term, but given the competitive situation with Symbian and MeeGo they really had no choice but to develop a third (platform) and juggle all three at once."

Elop described the Lumia phones as a "new dawn" for Nokia.

"Lumia is light ... Lumia is the first real Windows Phone," Elop declared to the London audience.

He acknowledged that since he took over the Nokia leadership a year ago there had been "some difficult moments and some tough decisions to make," including more than 12,000 layoffs, but was upbeat about the future.

"Eight months ago, here in London we outlined a new direction for Nokia," Elop said. "Since then we've gone through a significant transition and we are playing to win - no holding back, no hesitation, no second guessing."

Ovum analyst Nick Dillon said the success of the new Windows devices will be critical.

"The challenges which Nokia faces are significant - many potential Windows Phone customers will have already bought an Android or

iPhone and will have some form of attachment to those platforms," Dillon said. "Nokia will have a challenge to convince them to switch to what is a largely unknown, and therefore risky, alternative."

More information: Nokia: <http://www.nokia.com>

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