

Samsung on top as mobile phone sales dip: survey (Update)

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A display of mobile phone covers. Mobile phone sales worldwide suffered a rare dip in the first three months of this year on softened demand in Asian markets, industry tracker Gartner reported

Mobile phone sales worldwide suffered a rare dip in the first three months of this year on softened demand in Asian markets, industry tracker Gartner reported Wednesday.

Approximately 419.1 million mobile phones were bought worldwide during the quarter in a two percent decline from the same period a year earlier, Gartner said. It was the first quarterly decline since early in 2009.

"Global sales of mobile devices declined more than expected due to a slowdown in demand from the Asia-Pacific region," said Gartner principal research analyst Anshul Gupta.

"The first quarter, traditionally the strongest quarter for Asia -- which is driven by Chinese New Year -- saw a lack of new product launches from leading manufacturers, and users delayed upgrades in the hope of better smartphone deals arriving later in the year."

South Korean consumer electronics titan Samsung became the top mobile phone seller in the quarter, bumping Finland-based Nokia from a leading position it had held since 1998, according to Gartner.

Samsung sold 86.6 million mobile phones in a 25.9 percent increase from the prior year.

Samsung also reclaimed the smartphone market throne from iPhone maker Apple, selling 38 million Internet-compatible handsets in the quarter in which overall sales were 144.4 million, Gartner reported.

Smartphones powered by Google's Android software accounted for 56 percent of the global market, or 81.07 million handsets, while the iPhone operating system was the next most popular with 22.9 percent, or 33.12 million devices.

Samsung sold more than 40 percent of the Android-based smartphones bought in the first quarter of this year, according to Gartner.

Apple sales of the iPhone 4S nearly doubled in the quarter as the latest model of the smartphone spread to new markets.

Apple sold more than five million iPhones in China, making it the top market for the California-based company after the United States.

BlackBerry maker Research In Motion saw its share of the smartphone market slashed almost in half to 6.9 percent. RIM sold 9.9 million devices in the quarter, down from 13 million a year earlier, as

competitors encroached in markets around the world, according to Gartner.

"RIM desperately needs to deliver winning BB10 products to retain users and stay competitive," Gupta said, referring to a new smartphone platform being developed by the Canadian company.

"This will be very challenging, because BB10 lacks strong developer support, and a new BB10 device will only be available in the fourth quarter of 2012."

The ebb in mobile phone sales was expected to prompt price cuts on models left in stock rooms.

"The lower results in the first quarter of 2012 have led us to be cautious about sales for the remainder of the year," said Gartner principal analyst Annette Zimmermann.

"The continued roll-out of third generation (3G)-based smartphones by local and regional manufacturers such as Huawei, ZTE, Lenovo, Yulong and TCL Communication should help spur demand in China."

Launches of new Android phones along with models powered by Microsoft Windows software, along with the likely debut later this year of a new-generation iPhone, was expected to catalyze sales in the US and Western Europe.

However, Gartner trimmed 20 million units from its mobile phone sales forecast for this year.

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