

# Microsoft: Windows Phone to catch up in apps

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(AP)—Microsoft launched a new version of its Windows Phone software with broad support from smartphone makers, cellphone carriers and app developers as the software company tries to position new Windows gadgets as strong alternatives to Apple and Android devices.

The company also promised to address one of the chief shortcomings with [Windows Phone](#): the dearth of third-party applications relative to offerings for Apple's [iPhone](#) and devices running [Google's](#) Android system.

Windows Phone 8 is the successor to Windows Phone 7, which launched two years ago but has had little traction in the market. The new software will run on more powerful phones with flagship models coming from Nokia, Samsung and HTC. Together, they'll launch eight Windows Phone 8 smartphones before the year is out, starting this weekend overseas and later in November in the U.S.

"People all over the world are about to fall in love with Windows Phones," Microsoft CEO [Steve Ballmer](#) said at the Windows Phone 8 launch event in San Francisco on Monday.

Microsoft said it will also catch up in offering third-party apps. There are 120,000 applications available for Windows Phone, but some apps that are popular on other systems are notably missing from Windows Phone because it can be hard to get developers interested in writing programs for a small number of smartphones.

Microsoft is patching some of those holes soon: Microsoft vice president Joe Belfiore said Internet radio service Pandora is coming to Windows Phone 8, along with games such as "Where's My Water?" Soon, he said, 46 of the 50 most popular smartphone apps will be available.

The company is also releasing an app for [Skype](#), the Internet calling service it owns. The Skype app available for Windows Phone 7 was an unfinished, or "beta" version. The new Skype app will run in the background, listening for incoming calls without placing any drain on the battery, Belfiore said.

Microsoft scored a big endorsement from [Verizon Wireless](#), the largest cellphone carrier in the U.S. It will carry three Windows Phones this holiday season, including its first Nokia phone in many years. No. 2 AT&T Inc. and No. 4 T-Mobile USA will also carry Windows Phones from Nokia and HTC, leaving only No. 3 Sprint Nextel Corp. out.

Verizon executives have said that they want to see a viable "third ecosystem" alongside Apple's iPhone and Google's Android. Having more potential partners to work with provides the carriers with more leverage against each one and would make them less dependent on the whims of Apple and Google.

Microsoft released Windows 8 for desktops, laptops and tablets last week. That event was devoid of surprises, as Microsoft needed to work with hundreds of partners such as computer makers ahead of time. With smartphone software, the number of partners is much smaller, so Microsoft was able to save some details for Monday's launch event.

For example, Belfiore revealed that Windows Phone 8 will come with a "Kid's Corner" feature. If enabled, kids will be able to start up the phone from the lock screen, gaining access to apps and games that the phone's owner has designated as safe for them. Belfiore brought his three

children on stage to demonstrate the feature. Actress Jessica Alba lent star power to the event, endorsing Kid's Corner as a "busy mom."

Owners will also be able link apps to their lock screen, giving them at-a-glance information such as sports scores.

Windows 8 for computers has borrowed its look from Windows Phone 7, presenting applications not as icons but as "Live Tiles," which can be animated with data from the application. For instance, the "Pictures" tile shows a slideshow.

The live tiles and the distinctive user interface remain Microsoft's biggest selling points for Windows Phone. In terms of third-party applications and the features of the phones, it's mostly playing catch-up to the iPhone and [Android](#).

Microsoft will be emphasizing the consistent look across devices in a massive advertising campaign that will talk not just about its new software, but its venture in hardware manufacturing. On Friday, Microsoft released its first tablet computer, the Surface.

"Between Windows 8, Microsoft Surface or Windows Phone 8, you won't be able to turn on the TV or open a magazine without seeing a Microsoft Windows ad," Ballmer said.

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