

Microsoft pushes for new image with Windows Phone 8 release

November 2 2012, by Janet I. Tu



It wasn't hard to tell whom Microsoft was trying to win over with its Windows Phone 8 launch event Monday.

Microsoft transformed an area of a civic-center auditorium into a temporary swanky, chill lounge, complete with mood lighting and lit wall panels echoing Windows Phone's live tile colors.

Also, Jessica Alba showed up.

It all added up to some words not commonly associated with Microsoft: fun and cool.

Clearly, Microsoft - long associated with work, productivity and your company's IT department (the success of Xbox notwithstanding) - was trying to reach younger, hip consumers and attempting to do so not by talking about detailed specs, but by conveying a cohesive story about the overall meaning of the phone to people's lives.

Microsoft wanted to build a phone that could be personalized to each individual, said Microsoft CEO [Steve Ballmer](#), adding, "Windows Phone 8 is the culmination of these efforts. ... (It) is the most personal smartphone out there."

Executives also stressed how Windows Phone 8, along with other Microsoft devices and services, can make users' lives easier by tying in smoothly with the company's cloud services, products and entertainment offerings such as SkyDrive, Office and [Xbox](#) Music and Video.

"We brought the best of Microsoft to all Windows 8 devices," Ballmer said.

Microsoft needs to get that message across, and to generate excitement for Windows Phone 8 among consumers because it's fallen far behind in the smartphone market.

Only three years ago, Microsoft's Windows [Mobile platform](#) - which has since been phased out - held about 20 percent of the U.S. smartphone market.

These days, Microsoft's smartphone platform - including both the

outdated Windows Mobile and Windows Phone - makes up about 3.6 percent of that market.

As part of the effort to reverse that slide, Microsoft executives at Monday's event presented their cases for why Windows Phone 8 is different, and better, than its competitors.

They kept on message, stressing the platform's personalization features, including being able to "pin" tiles for the people and interests that matter to you most on your [smartphone](#)'s start screen. Windows Phone - like Windows 8, which launched last week - features a user interface that emphasizes "live tiles," rectangular and square tiles that can update with information in real time.

The executives talked about a feature called "live apps," in which certain applications on your phone can update on the phone's lock screen the information you care about most.

And Jessica Alba? The actress and mother of two young children came on stage to tout Windows Phone 8's Kid's Corner feature, which allows parents to create a separate area on the phone for their kids' apps and music. When kids play with their parents' phones, they can't touch the information and apps the parents have stored on the phone.

"Today's consumers aren't using their phones in isolation," said Joe Belfiore, Windows Phone corporate vice president for program management and design. "This year, Windows - from PC to tablet and phone - not only look and feel the same way, but they also work together in concert."

Belfiore also addressed an issue that often comes up: the number of apps in the Windows Phone Store, which is far behind iPhone and Android counterparts.

Windows Phone Store now has about 120,000 apps, he said, including 46 of the top 50 apps from other platforms now also on Windows Phone 8.

Belfiore also announced the Pandora app will come to Windows Phone Store 8 in 2013 and that it will include a year of free music with no ads.

Ballmer gave some specifics on which Windows Phone 8 devices will be available and where.

In the U.S., Verizon Wireless will carry the HTC Windows Phone 8X for \$199.99 and the Nokia Lumia 822 for \$99.99, both with a two-year contract and both available by Thanksgiving. It will also carry the Samsung Ativ Odyssey starting in December.

AT&T will carry the Nokia Lumia 920, the Lumia 820 and the HTC 8X. The phones will be available in November, but no specific date or prices were given.

T-Mobile will carry the HTC 8X for \$149.99 for the 16GB version and the Nokia Lumia 810 from \$99.99, both with a two-year contract. They will be available Nov. 14.

In addition, all 65 Microsoft Stores this holiday season will carry all the phones available in the U.S. The phones also will be available via [Microsoft's](#) online store.

One area the executives didn't address on stage was marketing, and how carriers will promote Windows Phone 8.

AT&T, for one, plans a big push, Elina Johnson, executive director of marketing for the West region of AT&T, said in an interview separate from the event.

In addition to training its sales force on the platform, "Windows Phone 8 will be our premier product not just for the holiday season but beyond the holidays," she said.

In addition, one of the [Windows Phone](#) devices will be chosen to be the carrier's "hero" device for its holiday season, meaning it gets prominent display and promotional push in the company's retail stores.

Said Johnson: "We are doing more this year by being louder with our marketing and with the longevity of the campaign."

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