

BlackBerry Q10 smartphone boasts rare physical keyboard

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BlackBerry Q10

Lovers of physical keyboards, BlackBerry hasn't forgotten about you. The Canadian company's Q10 smartphone, the second phone running the

new BlackBerry 10 operating system, began rolling out to U.S. carriers this week.

Featuring [BlackBerry](#)'s much-loved QWERTY keyboard, this is the smartphone for which many users were holding out. And struggling BlackBerry, in the midst of playing catch-up to the [iPhone](#) and Android devices, needs the [phone](#) to perform and sell well.

Physical keyboard phones are becoming more rare as touch-screen-only [mobile devices](#) take over. But BlackBerry, which built its reputation as an enterprise workhorse, has promised to remain faithful to professionals and others who prefer the speed, accuracy and tactile appeal of pushing buttons.

"We're convinced there is a significant segment of the market who prefers to have a physical keyboard," BlackBerry chief marketing officer Frank Boulben said Wednesday in an interview with the [Los Angeles Times](#) in Beverly Hills, Calif. "We want to continue to serve that segment."

The Times received a Q10 this week, and I've had a few days to play around with the device. We'll have a full review later, but my initial impression is that BlackBerry has built an impressive smartphone that keyboard loyalists will love. The challenge for BlackBerry will be persuading other users to give it a chance.

Unlike the sleek touch-screen-only Z10, released in March, the Q10 boasts the familiar look and feel of a traditional BlackBerry. In a nod to the popularity of touch screens, the Q10 is actually a hybrid that combines a [physical keyboard](#) with a 3.1-inch touch screen.

What I first noticed out of the box was the Q10's display size. BlackBerry added real estate to the touch screen by getting rid of the

large buttons above the keyboard. That means no more home or call buttons, making the [user experience](#) much less intuitive - and it means you'll have to use the touch screen all the time, like it or not.

Without a home button, BlackBerry 10 phones rely primarily on swipes to navigate around. Swipe left for applications and swipe right to access the BlackBerry Hub, a convenient central location that combines emails, text messages, phone calls and other conversations. There's no need to close out of applications to access another one, which BlackBerry officials say saves users time and differentiates BlackBerry 10 phones from rival devices.

The phone, which comes with 16 gigabytes of storage, has a number of apps pre-loaded including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Foursquare and YouTube, but a major complaint of BlackBerry 10 is that it has only a fraction of the apps found on iOS and Android devices.

Phone call quality, which often goes unmentioned these days as smartphone makers hype other features, was solid.

The 8-megapixel rear camera took acceptable shots. The phone comes with several on-board photo editing features, including Time Shift, which enables users to select the best image from a series of moments. But the photo quality lags behind the Samsung Galaxy S4 and the HTC One.

So far, my biggest gripe is that the touch screen on the Q10 isn't as sensitive as on other smartphones. In the setup phase, I had to touch several times on the same spot before the phone responded; the same thing happened when I tried to end a call.

It's a bit ironic, because my major problem with my BlackBerry Bold 9900 is that the screen is too sensitive - the majority of times when I

take a call on it, the [touch screen](#) incorrectly interprets the pressure from the side of my face and starts dialing other numbers or putting my conversation on speaker. I'm glad the Q10 seems to have corrected the problem, but I also don't want to have to touch my screen over and over to get it to do what I want.

T-Mobile released the phone Wednesday. Verizon Wireless, which has the exclusive on the white version of the Q10, offered the phone online Thursday and will offer it in stores Monday. AT&T began pre-orders for the phone Wednesday but hasn't provided a release date. Sprint has been more vague, saying that it will carry the phone sometime this summer.

The long-overdue BlackBerry 10 operating system has been called a make-or-break product for BlackBerry. The company has already announced three smartphones for the platform - the Z10, Q10 and the Q5, a more affordable QWERTY device set to be released sometime this summer - and Boulben said the company has plans to launch more BlackBerry 10 phones as it tries to recapture lost market share.

Already the company is seeing former customers come back, Boulben said. About 55 percent of BlackBerry 10 users switched over from iPhones and [Android](#) devices, he said.

"We are appealing to customers who want something different," he said. "BlackBerry 10 allows us to completely renew our portfolio of devices."

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