

# Blackberry's time has passed, as will the iPhone's—such is the way

August 15 2013, by Jason But

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The introduction of new-look smartphones such as the Z10 has done little to lift BlackBerry's fortunes. Credit: Moridin

You'll have seen the news about BlackBerry – the once undisputed champion in communications technology – essentially putting itself up for sale this week, and may be lamenting the decline of a tech giant. But dry your tears.

Such deaths are commonplace in this area of technology. Just as the iPhone muscled in and usurped a device so popular it was dubbed the Crackberry, another player – Samsung in combination with Google/Android operating system – might take down the Apple offering.

For every tech company or innovation on the way up, another market leader seems destined for irrelevance.

BlackBerry's parent company BlackBerry Ltd – a Canadian wireless and [telecommunications equipment](#) formerly known as Research in Motion (RIM) – announced it was now exploring "strategic alternatives", following the product's decline in popularity over recent years.

Just as we saw Nokia toppled from its once-dominant market position before the smartphone era, the BlackBerry is a product whose time was marked when Apple released the first iPhone in 2007.

The technology lifespan of products suffers from longevity problems mainly due to the need to keep innovating.

Not only do existing players find it difficult to dominate, but the pre-existing installed hardware and software base decreases their ability to quickly respond to changes in market demands.

## **BlackBerry's rise**

The first BlackBerry was a two-way pager device released in 1999; but it wasn't until 2003 that the BlackBerry smartphone was introduced. It was a revolutionary device, allowing users to browse the internet, email and fax, alongside the usual text message and [voice calls](#).

While commonplace today, providing instant access to email was groundbreaking in the early 2000s. The popularity of the BlackBerry – boosted by numerous film and television appearances – seemed unassailable.



The Apple iPhone 5, introduced last year. Credit: Apple/EPA

The phone's long-standing reputation for [data security](#) – information is encrypted using the Triple DES and AES standards – added notoriety to the device; it became the activists' handset of choice, in outbreaks such as the 2011 London riots.

The BlackBerry business model was built on subscribers paying a fee to connect to a centralised BlackBerry Enterprise Server. As its name suggests, the server synchronised all BlackBerry functions between

connected devices within an organisation.

When the market was young, this approach allowed BlackBerry to offer an integrated solution, and to ensure the quality of its offering to its (mainly business) customers. The centralised approach also allowed BlackBerry to grow while supporting upgrades through changes to the central server.

As with all products that suffer in the technology life-cycle, the BlackBerry continued to provide for consumer needs until a new innovation – namely the Apple iPhone – supplanted it.

## **BlackBerry's fall**

While the centralised model originally allowed the BlackBerry to maintain market dominance and to push updates to subscribers, it would also prove to be its downfall as the market matured.

The larger a centralised system becomes, the harder it becomes to maintain and innovate new applications/features. Given this, it's highly likely it became impossible to develop new applications for the BlackBerry in a similar timeframe to applications for newer devices.

When it emerged in 2007, the iPhone was evidently a more modern interface. It provided entertainment features that sat comfortably alongside business features, and provided a model in which third-party development of applications allowed users to extend and personalise the feature set of their devices. A locked-down central server such as BlackBerry's meant users couldn't personalise their devices.

Allowing third-party software essentially requires making it fundamentally simple for anybody to develop for the device. By allowing access to others, Apple was able to shorten development time and

increase innovation.

With the BlackBerry on its knees, a further blow was dealt by the recent popularity of cloud services – a network of remote rather than local servers to store and manage data – and the "internet everywhere" paradigm.

By enforcing access through a central server, BlackBerry essentially locked third-parties out of their system, restricting their customer base. It was inevitable that the BlackBerry would become usurped as king of the smartphones.

## **The iPhone ... and beyond**

If the technology lifespan is short, should we also expect to see the iPhone to be usurped by a younger, more innovative competitor? Well, yes. The Samsung Galaxy S4, which runs the Android operating system, surpassed Apple in US phone sales in May this year.

Among other features, the Galaxy S4 boasts a 13-megapixel camera, expandable storage to 96 gigabytes, and eye-tracking software.

The Google-developed Android system opens up the platform to third-parties, even more-so than Apple did, thus allowing more innovation. This could land Apple in exactly the same scenario BlackBerry found itself in when the first iPhone was released.

While Apple is strongly fighting Samsung in court, in the end the only opinion that matters is that of the users.

Five years ago, nobody would have expected a phone that could function as a GPS, camera, diary, document editor and generic entertainment machine (among myriad other functions). Who could dare imagine what

these devices might offer five years hence?

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