

Ex-Nokia engineers launch new smartphone (Update)

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A man holds up the new Jolla smartphone from Finnish mobile manufacturer Jolla in Helsinki, Wednesday, Nov. 27, 2013. Engineers who used to work for Nokia are hoping to grab a share of the lucrative and highly competitive smartphone market with a new handset, which is based on the former world No. 1 cellphone maker's old software and is faintly reminiscent of its recent models. (AP Photo/ Lehtikuva, Roni Rekoma)

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The Jolla handset's Sailfish platform has been developed from the MeeGo operating software, Nokia's last open-source platform which it abandoned in 2011 when it switched over to using Microsoft Corp.'s Windows system.

The sleek 4.5-inch phone, which almost looks like it could be part of Nokia's Lumia range, features an eight megapixel camera, supports fast 4G Internet connections and includes the well-received Nokia's HERE mapping services that cover more than 190 countries.

But, unlike Nokia's phones, Jolla is also compatible with more than 85,000 apps provided by Google Inc.'s Android, the popular and dominant operating system that has helped Samsung overtake the former Finnish bellwether to be the world's largest cellphone maker.

Marc Dillon, head of Jolla software and one of four founders of the company in 2011, spent 11 years working for Nokia after moving from the United States. He says Jolla's open operating system gives it an edge over rivals.

"We are providing a world-class choice ... that is an alternative for consumers (and) that can be very agile and powerful," Dillon said in an interview in a Helsinki office block previously occupied by Nokia employees before it laid off thousands. "For our operating system business we have a huge opportunity because there is currently one choice really available to every global mobile manufacturer and that's Android."



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Other systems, such as Apple's iOS or Microsoft's Windows, can be carried only on handsets manufactured by those companies.

In a consumer test, the Jolla, which has a price tag of 399 euros (\$540), didn't seem to have much to make it stand out among other smartphones.

Its camera is standard; it uses a MicroSD card; has 16GB of memory storage, with a talk time and battery time of some 9-10 hours. But it has nice touches, including multiple swipe features and a useful user-replaceable battery, unlike many other models.

Neil Mawston from Strategy Analytics near London says the Jolla is not "an iPhone or Samsung Galaxy killer" although it but could find a niche in the relentless smartphone race.

"At some point people will start looking for an alternative to Android and Apple so there might be an opportunity in this very cyclical market for Jolla to grab market share," Mawston said. "But I think it will be two or three versions down the line before we really know whether Jolla or Sailfish is worthy of challenging Apple or Android or Microsoft."

Finnish telecoms company DNA, which started selling the Jolla handset on Wednesday evening as hundreds lined up outside the Jolla-DNA marquee in the city center, said it had "thousands of preorders" in 136 countries, led by Finland, Germany and Britain.

The company Jolla, which now has more than 100 employees in Finland and Hong Kong, has found backers among Finnish and foreign investors, including Hong-Kong based China Fortune Holdings Ltd., but Dillon declined to give more information.

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