

Gadget Watch: Fastlane in Nokia X shows promise

February 28 2014, by Anick Jesdanun



A woman shows the new Nokia XL at the Mobile World Congress, the world's largest mobile phone trade show in Barcelona, Spain, Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2014. The global wireless show that wraps up on Thursday has seen a push to get mobile devices cheap enough to reach emerging markets without sacrificing so much performance. While the affluent crave the latest iPhones or Android phones, most of the world can't afford the hundreds of dollars they cost. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

(AP)—By design, Nokia's new Android smartphones will underwhelm

users of high-end phones. The Nokia X line was created with emerging markets in mind, so the company emphasized keeping prices low, meaning the user interface is relatively simple.

The home screen resembles the one on Nokia's Windows-based Lumia phones, even though it's Android underneath. But Nokia Corp. added a Fastlane feature, a screen with quick access to your most-used apps. You get to it by swiping from the left or right edge of the home screen or tapping the back button at the bottom.

The basic Nokia X phone costs 89 euros (\$122) and has a 4-inch screen, measured diagonally, and a 3 megapixel camera. A X+ version with an SD storage card costs 99 euros, while an XL with a 5-inch screen and 5 megapixel camera goes for 109 euros.

In the brief time I've had with the Nokia X at this week's Mobile World Congress wireless show in Barcelona, Spain, I have found the Fastlane feature to be a good start. It's something I would like to see on more phones, including Nokia's Windows devices.

I hate to spend time customizing gadgets, getting the icons for the most-used apps on the main home screen. The nice thing about Fastlane is that you don't have to spend any time on that. Your favorite apps are just one swipe away—sort of.

The top of Fastlane shows you what's coming up, whether that's alarms about to ring or future events in your calendar. Below that are your recently used apps. The ones you just used will be at the top, so you don't have to scroll down.

For some apps, you get information that normally comes with notifications, such as previews of text messages or alerts that three people have tried to reach you on WeChat, a Chinese social network.

You see small versions of recent photos and can tap for the larger version in the photo gallery app. You see calls you missed, songs you heard and websites you visited.

It could get overwhelming, so you can block certain apps and certain notifications from appearing in Fastlane. In the settings, you can also add a shortcut to one social network, such as Facebook or Twitter.

That's where Fastlane can improve—understanding better which apps I use most over a period of days or months and creating a section at the top for those.

This week, for example, I was too busy to check Facebook, but that doesn't mean I don't use it regularly. But in Fastlane, Facebook would drop toward the bottom in a matter of days, unless I happen to choose it as my one shortcut.

Why not make sure the most-used apps are stored as favorites at the top of the screen? Nokia says it's considering that.

Likewise, if I haven't used something for months after using it daily, Fastlane can assume I've grown tired of it and automatically remove it. Myspace anyone?

Nokia doesn't plan to make Fastlane for its Windows phones, and I doubt it'll extend it to rival Android phones, such as my Samsung Galaxy S III. It's something it wants to keep exclusive to its own phones to compete.

That's understandable, yet a shame.

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