

Five features an Amazon phone might offer (Update)

April 18 2014, by Mae Anderson



A report this week in The Wall Street Journal that Amazon is planning to release a smartphone has prompted industry analysts and technology blogs to muse about what the device might offer.

Amazon hasn't confirmed that it has plans for a smartphone. Introducing such a device would be tough in a crowded market dominated by Apple and Samsung. Even so, innovations like the Kindle Fire and Prime membership program demonstrate that the online retailing giant has a knack for using its massive size and marketing budget to capitalize on gaps in the marketplace.

Some unconfirmed reports say the phone could have a 3-D interface and

multiple front-facing cameras.

Here's a look at five features technology experts believe Amazon might include on its smartphone.

1. 3-D shopping

A 3-D interface doesn't require special glasses could have a lot of uses. For example, when you're shopping online, you could pull up a 3-D image of sneakers or a jacket and see all of the features easier, suggests Bill Menezes, principal research analyst at Gartner. Another possibility: you could scan your living room to make a 3-D rendering. Then, when you're out furniture shopping, take a picture and digitally insert the product into the rendering to see if it fits.

"You could see 'Oh that's how that purple couch looks in the bedroom, I think I'll buy it,' and you avoid buyer's remorse," says Ramon Llamas, research manager of research firm IDC's mobile phones team.

2. Enhanced games

Amazon is rapidly expanding into the gaming arena with its Amazon Game Studio and video game offerings on its new streaming device, Amazon Fire TV.

"A phone could be a way to help them potentially push more on the game front," says CRT Capital analyst Neil Doshi.

The phone's purported 3-D interface could be a way to offer a more robust gaming experience.

3. Seamless grocery shopping

Amazon has been testing a Wi-Fi wand called Amazon Dash that simplifies barcode scanning. Such capabilities could be included in the Amazon phone to improve on current barcode scanning apps. Combine that with Amazon's same-day grocery service Amazon Fresh, currently in testing in Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco, and grocery shopping could be drastically simplified. Rather than dragging a shopping cart through aisles—or even scrolling through a list of products online—a quick wave of the phone in your pantry could have all your groceries at your doorstep within hours.

"It's an opportunity to continue to tie users into the Amazon ecosystem," Doshi says.

4. Free streaming video

IDC's Llamas suggests one of the phone's selling points could be a free ad-supported version of Amazon's current instant Video service, which is included in the \$99-per-year Prime membership. The hypothetical service could be viewed on the phone, a Kindle or on Amazon's Fire TV but not elsewhere like Xbox or Roku, he says, which could be a selling point for the phone.

5. Competitive pricing

Menezes at Gartner speculates that the phone could be offered on different price tiers. One tier could be a one-time payment for the phone that offers Amazon's apps and services but a limited number of other features. A higher price tier could feature a monthly bill and a phone with more bells and whistles.

It's difficult to be competitive on price in the cutthroat phone market. But as Amazon has shown with its tablets, the company is willing to deliver high-quality hardware at a loss in order to undercut competitors

like Apple and put its devices in the hands of people who will use them to buy Amazon's goods and services.

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