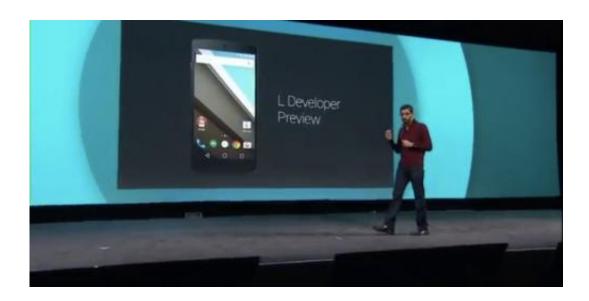# Android L makes sense, even if it doesn't set the world alight

June 27 2014, by Barry Avery

L is for long game. Google

Google has unveiled a host of new directions at its annual developers conference this week.

They included a preview of the latest version of the Android operating system and plans to spread the platform into cars. Perhaps most importantly though, Android is about to become much more coherent.

Google has doubled the number of active Android phone users to more than one billion in the past year and, like Apple, it wants to update the system to make it better for users and developers. So far named only L,

the latest version will be fully released to users later. Rumour has it that it will be called Lollipop, to fit the theme followed so far with previous Android versions called Donut, Jellybean, Icecream Sandwich and other sweet treats. Google really should work on better product names.

L is an attempt at solving a central problem for Google – inconsistency. Android users often don't update to the latest version – Google needs to reverse this trend. Supporting these operating systems is forcing developers to create different versions of their apps, adding complexity to the Android store.

L is the fifth version of Android and appears to focus on interface. There is a push for a more consistent look and feel across devices in response to criticisms. Whereas Apple's operating system runs only on Apple devices, Android is used on phones and tablets made by a huge number of manufacturers, from Samsung to HTC to Sony.Each can overlay the Android interface with their own so the system can look completely different from one phone to another. That can be annoying if you have, say, a Sony phone and a Samsung tablet.

Other features in Android L include a shared notification system that will allow data from phones to appear on laptops, cars and other devices, somewhat similar to Apple's continuity feature. There are also battery monitoring software tools, following Apple's lead on power management.

Google hopes that its Android One specification will also make things more consistent in the cheap smartphone market – which is growing particularly quickly in emerging markets. Android One details the minimum memory, processor specifications and software applications that will be available, which should allow developers to create apps that will run on all these devices.

Also announced were Android Wear, Android Auto and Android TV, designed to broaden Google's reach. Google is signing up manufacturing partners that will use its software in smart watches, car dashboard systems and smart TVs. Services and apps will, to some extent, work across these different platforms, although how much data Google will be able to harvest from people interacting with these systems is unclear.

Most notably lacking at the event were Google Glass and Google+, which was surprising considering the emphasis Google placed on these in previous events.

If all this sounds a bit familiar, that's because it is. Apple and Google seem to be trapped in a feature exchange spiral at the moment. When Apple announced the opening up of its operating system at its own developers conference, many pointed out that many of the new features had been available on Android for some time. And now we have Google rolling out competitors to Apple's CarPlay, Health Kit, Continuity and Apple TV. Both companies are pushing their technologies out beyond the phone and tablet so the question is which will prove more popular among the companies that will be making smart technologies. Winning the OS battle might ultimately depend on them.

This story is published courtesy of The Conversation *(under Creative Commons-Attribution/No derivatives).*

Source: The Conversation

provided for information purposes only.