

Google Android software spreading to cars, watches, TV (Update)

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Sundar Pichai, senior vice president of Android, Chrome & Apps, speaks on stage during the Google I/O Developers Conference on June 25, 2014 in San Francisco, California

Google is expanding its empire to cars, watches, businesses and televisions.

The technology titan laid out a sweeping vision at the opening of a sold-out developers conference in a keynote presentation streamed online to

millions of people across the world.

"We are beginning to evolve our platforms beyond mobile," Android and Chrome teams chief Sundar Pichai said of how Google's twin operating systems are being adapted to work with one another and with new types of computing hardware.

Google's goal, according to Pichai, is to have its software be a foundation for applications, services or digital content delivered seamlessly across the increasingly diverse array of Internet-linked screens in people's lives.

A new LG G smartwatch and a freshly-announced Gear Live smartwatch by Samsung that both work with the "Android Wear" platform debuted Wednesday at the online shop Google Play.

On-stage demonstrations included ordering a pizza in seconds, fielding reminders and messages, and using voice commands on smartwatches.

An eagerly awaited Moto 360 smartwatch is due to join the Android Wear lineup later this year.

"These are the first three watches, but there are more on the way," Pichai said.

Android on the road

Android Auto software for cars, synching smartphones with in-dashboard screens and controls, is being shared with automakers, and vehicles are set to be equipped by the end of this year.

Android Auto brings apps like Google Maps and Spotify music service to an "interface built for driving," according to a freshly formed

coalition of technology and car companies called the Open Automotive Alliance.



A presenter demonstrates Android Auto on stage during the Google I/O Developers Conference at Moscone Center on June 25, 2014 in San Francisco, California

Google also announced another shot at smart televisions with Android TV software for what are typically the biggest screens in homes.

Google is giving televisions "the same level of attention that phones and tablets have enjoyed," according to Android engineering director Dave Burke.

Android smartphones, complete with voice command features, could be used to direct searches and more on television screens, an on-stage

demonstration showed.

Games from the Google Play shop could also be played on televisions.

Expanding Google empire

"The Google empire is trying to grow," Gartner consumer technology research director Brian Blau told AFP on the sidelines of the San Francisco keynote presentation.

"Google is trying to be more like Apple; create more consistent experiences with devices that work together."

Handset or tablet makers are free to customize free Android software to suit hardware and set themselves apart from rivals, but this has resulted in popular applications working on some gadgets and not others in a situation referred to as "fragmentation."



A representative gives a product demonstration of a Motorola Moto 360 watch during the Google I/O Developers Conference at Moscone Center on June 25, 2014 in San Francisco, California

Apple, on the other hand, so tightly controls software powering iPhones, iPads and iPod touch devices that developers can more easily target broad audiences.

Improving how well popular services or applications work across Android devices should also entice users to "lock in" to the platform the way Apple devotees remain loyal to the Cupertino, California company's gear, according to Blau.

"Lots of variations of Android make developers work harder to support all those devices," the analyst said.

"A consistent experience will help Google in the long run."

Google also showed off steps it is taking to make Android devices along with its services offered in the Internet "cloud" amenable to workplaces.

Improvements include tools for separating personal and company uses of mobile devices, as well as better handling of files made using Microsoft Word, Excel or PowerPoint programs.

Outside the convention center, protesters dressed as "Star Wars" film bad guy Darth Vader to remind Google of its founding vow not to be evil.

Protests did not disrupt on-stage presentations, and Pichai made a point

of addressing criticism that women engineers are scarce in Silicon Valley firms.

Among those watching the conference online was a group of female developers in Nigeria, said Pichai, who noted that more than a fifth of those taking part in the conference are women.

"We are working hard to elevate women in computer sciences," Pichai said.

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