

Google releases work tools designed for Android phones

February 25 2015, by Michael Liedtke

(AP)—Google is releasing a set of tools designed for businesses and employees who want to get work done on Android-powered smartphones, setting up a skirmish on another key front of mobile computing.

The technology unveiled Wednesday launches Google's attempt to turn Android phones into the digital hub of people's personal and professional lives. The expansion will pit Google Inc. against Microsoft Corp. and BlackBerry Inc., which have been focusing on the corporate market for years. Google will also be dueling its biggest rival in mobile computing, Apple Inc., which forged a partnership with IBM Corp. last year to build more iPhone and iPad applications tailored for businesses and government agencies.

Google and Apple have become so dominant that 96 percent of the smartphones sold last year run on the companies' software, according to the research firm IDC. But most people use those phones to take pictures, message their friends, check Facebook and Twitter and engage in other personal endeavors. In many cases, people also may check their work email on their phones.

But Google and Apple are trying to make it more enticing and convenient for people to transplant their more of their professional lives on to their phones. As part of that process, the companies are rolling out more business-oriented applications and tougher security to make employers feel more comfortable about their workers using their phones

for their jobs.

"Our vision is that every employee out there should have a work-enabled device in their hands," said Rajen Sheth, director of product management for Android's push into the office.

Far more people already own Android phones than iPhones, a lead that Google hopes works to its advantage in the corporate mobility market. IDC estimates more than 1 billion Android phones were sold last year, compared to 193 million iPhones. The huge disparity has largely been driven by Google's decision to give away its Android phones, helping to make the devices running on the software more affordable than iPhones. By design, Apple has focused on more affluent consumers.

The corporate and government market is appealing because employers are willing to spend more people on applications and security than most consumers.

Google announced its Android for Work program at a conference eight months ago, but needed more time to test the technology before its release.

The tools include the ability to create separate personal and professional profiles on the same phone in an effort to reassure workers worried about their bosses snooping on their private lives. Even though the data is kept in separate silos, Google has created a way for work programs and personal apps such as Facebook to appear on the same home screen for convenience.

Android for Work will be automatically available on phones running on the most recent release of the operating system, "Lollipop," or version 5.0. An Android for Work app can be downloaded to make the package work on phones running older versions of the software. Google's Play

store is also opening a section devoted to work applications.

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