

Europe vies for lost mobile glory against Asia, US

March 5 2015, by Laure Fillon



South Korea's Samsung, US firm Apple with its iPhone, and Chinese upstarts such as Huawei lead the battle of the smartphones today

Once a mobile telecom leader, Europe has lost out in recent years to giant companies in Asia and the United States. Now it wants to get back in the race.

The battle of the smartphones is now fought between South Korea's

Samsung, US firm Apple with its iPhone, and Chinese upstarts such as Huawei.

Europe hosted the Mobile World Congress trade fair in Barcelona this week—but it was dominated by several of these giants, minus Apple.

"Europe can feel like the focal point of the industry -- at least for a week. One week, then most of the major trendsetters will head back to the United States or to Asia," said Claudia Nemat, a member of Deutsche Telekom's board, ahead of the fair.

"We need European companies that can compete on the global market, especially in the digital economy. Otherwise, our only place in this global competition will be as a location for others to sell their services."

Europe's telecom industry went through a golden age in the 2000s with the launch of the 3G third-generation of network coverage.

Finland's Nokia was the leading manufacturer of handsets and a smartphone pioneer, but after being overtaken sold its mobile phone services in 2013 to the US Internet company Microsoft.

Mobile phone coverage has evolved into the faster 4G standard, but experts say Asia and the United States are far ahead of Europe in rolling out those networks.

Rise of China

Inside smartphones, the operating systems developed by Apple and Internet titan Google are the most widely used worldwide. Apple and Samsung are the world's biggest sellers of handsets.



A man on his mobile during the 2015 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona on March 5, 2015

Apple habitually boycotts the Barcelona fair and Samsung stole the show there this year with the launch of its top new smartphone, the Galaxy S6.

Another South Korean phone maker, LG, also made headlines with its connected phone-wristwatch, the Urbane LTE.

Elsewhere in Asia, Chinese firms such as Lenovo, Huawei and Xiaomi are booming. In the fourth quarter of 2014, they were third-, fourth- and fifth-biggest sellers of smartphones in the world, according to a ranking by consultancy Gartner.

"They are developing strongly," said Anne Bouverot, head of the GSMA association which groups 800 telecom operators.

Getting into wearables

Analysts say 2015 will be a boom year for "wearables" like smartwatches, and some see an opportunity there for Europe.

"Countries like Switzerland, for example, have particular expertise" in that area, said Jan Wassmann, a new technology specialist at German market research institute GfK.

"Our strength is being able to use the DNA of Swiss watchmaking and design watches that people will want to wear every day," Boris Brault, chief executive of MyKronoz, a Swiss startup, told AFP.



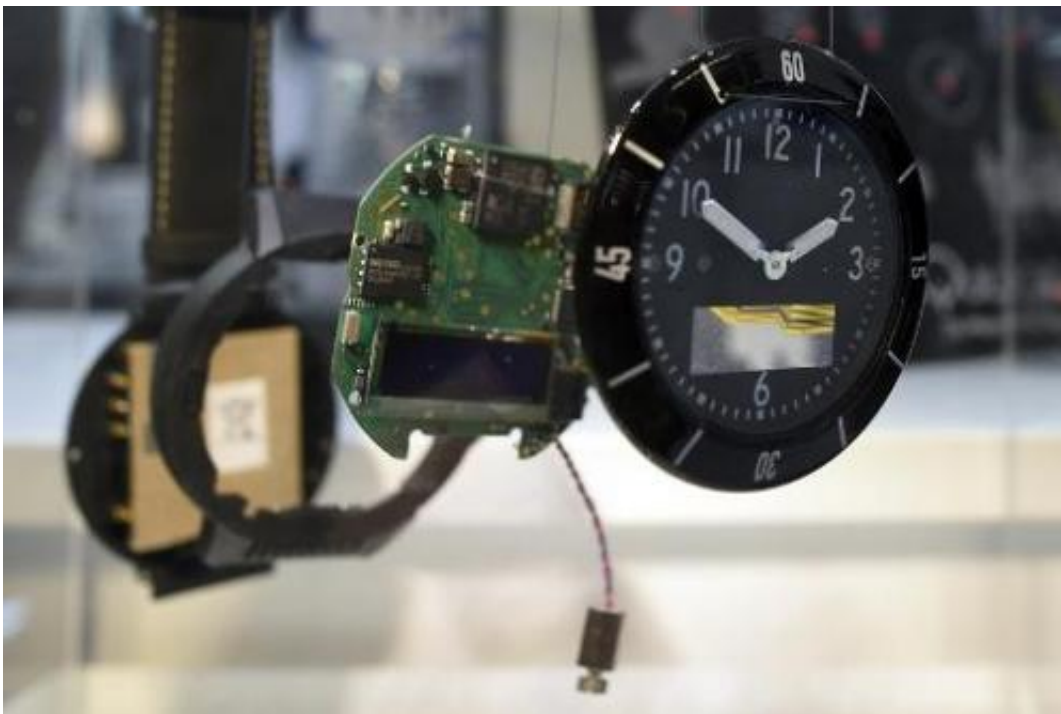
Tech companies showcased connected gadgets at the world's biggest wireless telecom fair, the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona

His company designs its watches in Switzerland, but like virtually all wireless devices nowadays, they are manufactured in China.

Other countries are hoping to add technical know-how to the boom in smart devices, such as France, which had 120 companies represented at the Mobile World Congress.

"One of our strengths is having very good engineering schools," said Eric Morand of Business France, an agency promoting French companies abroad.

Europe and 5G



The clock Navigil S1 is presented in disassembled pieces during the 2015 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona

Although it is considered to be lagging in 4G, Europe is already positioning itself as phone companies plan the next generation of 5G networks, which they hope to roll out by 2020.

The European Union has set up a public-private partnership with telecom firms to invest in developing 5G networks.



The "FiLIP" watch by Telefonica presented at the 2015 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona

In Barcelona on Tuesday, the EU's digital economy commissioner Guenther Oettinger presented the bloc's 5G vision.

"With 5G Europe has a great opportunity to reinvent its telecom industrial landscape," he said.

© 2015 AFP

Citation: Europe vies for lost mobile glory against Asia, US (2015, March 5) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-europe-vies-lost-mobile-glory.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.