

Developers get early look at new Android software

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Google provided developers with a "work in progress" build of Android's "N release" in hopes of getting feedback critical to improving their devices

Google on Wednesday let developers have an early look at the next version of Android in a move that could get the software into a wider variety of devices.

The US Internet colossus behind the world's most popular mobile

operating system broke from its tradition of releasing new versions of Android at its annual developers conference, which will take place in May this year.

"We're doing something a little different this year by releasing the preview early... really early," Google vice president of engineering Dave Burke said in a blog post.

"By releasing a 'work in progress' build earlier in development, we have more time to incorporate developer feedback."

The developer preview of the "N release" of Android, versions of which have historically been named after sweet treats, should help Google have it ready for device makers by the middle of the year, according to Burke.

New features touted by Google included the ability for applications to launch split-screen modes on smartphones or tablets.

"In addition, activities can also go into picture-in-picture mode on devices like TVs, and is a great feature for apps that play video," Burke said.

Android is also continuing to invest in Project Svelte, which aims to reduce the amount of memory space required so it can run on a broader range of devices.

An updated software developers kit allows for testing on Google-branded Nexus 6, Nexus 5X, Nexus 6P, Nexus Player, Nexus 9, and Pixel C devices.

"As we get closer to a final product, we'll be inviting consumers to try it out as well," Burke said.

Google makes Android software available free to device makers. The latest version known as Android 6.0 Marshmallow began rolling out late last year.

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