

Phone firms turn to artificial intelligence at top mobile fair

February 24 2017, by Daniel Silva



Virtual reality will be in focus at the Barcelona mobile fair, the world's biggest

Phone makers will seek to seduce new buyers with artificial intelligence functions and other innovations at the world's biggest mobile fair starting Monday in Spain.

Along with launches of [new smartphones](#) from major players like Huawei and LG, two former giants—Nokia and Blackberry—will

attempt to make a comeback with new devices.

Nokia is reportedly set to reveal several new devices at the four-day Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in northeastern Spain, including an updated version of its iconic 3310 phone.

Blackberry will debut a new high-end device rumoured to be called the Mercury. Like Nokia, its [new phones](#) will be made under licence by a Chinese manufacturer.

"Don't expect innovation on smartphones' hardware, but instead a focus on emerging technologies" like virtual reality and [artificial intelligence](#) (AI), said Forrester analyst Thomas Husson.

Samsung Electronics, which had to discontinue its Galaxy Note 7 smartphone last year after several cases of the devices exploding, will not unveil any new phones at the congress.

The delay in putting out a new phone comes as its parent firm, South Korean conglomerate Samsung Group, is caught up in a corruption scandal that saw its chief arrested last week.



Smartphone sales in developed markets may have peaked, experts say

Samsung is the world's biggest seller of smartphones but saw its share of the world's market shrink by two full percentage points to 20.5 percent, according to the Gartner consultancy.

It faces growing competition from Chinese [phone makers](#) on one side and on the other from US titan Apple, which released its iPhone 7 in September.

Strong sales of the iPhone 7 helped Apple to post record revenues of \$78.4 billion (82.6 billion euros) in the final quarter of 2017 although it also lost market share last year.

Apple, the world's second biggest seller of smartphones, does not present at the show in Barcelona.

With Samsung not unveiling a new phone, the rest of the industry will have a rare opportunity to grab the spotlight in Barcelona.

The congress comes as smartphone sales in developed markets, mainly Western Europe and North America, are poised to peak this year, according to research firm CCS Insight.

"Unless we see a major new disruption similar to the one prompted by the iPhone's arrival in 2007, we expect smartphone sales in Western Europe and North America to slowly decline after 2017," said CCS analyst Jasdeep Badyal.



5G is the new black

CCS predicts the global phone market will reach 2.35 billion units in

2019, up from 1.96 billion in 2014.

'New wave'

With smartphone market saturated in key markets, the battle for profits is shifting away from the handset to other connected devices, analyst say.

Several new wearable products are expected to be unveiled in Barcelona as well as 360-degree cameras and connected objects, from appliances to cars.

"We are searching for a new wave that will fuel growth," said Yves Gassot, the general director of IDATE, a European think tank on the digital economy.

Tech firms and experts in Barcelona will also mull what leaps forward in wireless coverage and technology are needed to create a new "5G" generation of super-fast wireless connections.

Blazing fast 5G mobile internet service is about 1,000 times faster than the 4G currently widely available in the developed world—quick enough to download a full length film in less than a second.

"We are in a transition phase between 4G, which is already widely available, and a 5G whose norms have not been established and remains in the pilot phase," said Gassot.

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