

Essential Phone on its way to early adopters

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Essential, the new smartphone company founded by Android operating system creator Andy Rubin, is planning to ship its first pre-ordered flagship smartphones soon. The general launch date for the Essential Phone remains unknown, despite months of publicity and continued intrigue among Silicon Valley's gadget-loving circles. Recently, Essential's exclusive carrier Sprint announced it will open Phone pre-orders on its own website and stores. Essential opened up pre-orders on

its website in May when the product was first unveiled.

With hopes of becoming the high-end upstart to challenge the iPhone and Samsung Galaxy and shake up the saturated [smartphone](#) market, Essential recently received a \$300 million investment from Amazon and the Chinese internet giant Tencent.

Essential partnered with Sprint as its exclusive carrier in July and will be available in more than 3,500 Sprint locations once the Phone is released. Essential Phone will also be available on Amazon and Best Buy.

"Every now and then, I'll decide to start a company because I see an opportunity," Rubin said earlier this week in a press briefing in Essential's headquarters in Palo Alto. "People have neglected hardware for years, decades. The rest of the venture business is focused on software, on service."

Essential wanted to make a timeless, high-powered [phone](#), according to Rubin. Its bezel-less and logo-less design is reinforced by titanium parts, stronger than the industry standard aluminum parts, and a ceramic exterior. It has no buttons in its front display but has a fingerprint scanner on the back.

The company is also making accessories, like an attachable 360-degree camera, and the Phone will work with products from its competition, such as the Apple Homekit.

"How do you build technology that consumers are willing to invest in?" asked Rubin. "Inter-operability is really, really important. We acknowledge that, and we inter-operate with companies even if they are our competitors."

While the 5.7-inch phone feels denser than its Apple and Samsung

counterparts, it is bereft of bloatware - rarely used default apps that are common in new smartphones. When Rubin announced Essential, he pointed to bloatware as one of his biggest regrets of the current state of Android phones.

But making a high-powered smartphone with minimalist design from scratch has been a challenge. Essential reportedly missed its initial June deadline and has demurred from announcing a launch date.

Rubin recently announced on Twitter that Essential Phone was in full mass production.

During the press briefing, Rubin and other Essential executives explained they wanted to get the Phone as perfect as they reasonably could. On one table, they laid out more than 30 iterations of the 360-degree camera accessory, which evolved over 18 months.

Essential said that it will produce around one Phone accessory every quarter to add a new smartphone experience unavailable in its competitors.

"We continue to revamp our products right up to the ramp moment," said Essential Chief Operating Officer Niccolo De Masi. "Consumer choice is lower than it was four, five years ago. We are trying to solve consumer pain points."

An unlocked Phone is priced at \$699 on Essential's website, which is cheaper than an unlocked iPhone 7 Plus or Samsung Galaxy S8 priced at \$769 and \$749, respectively. Essential currently has a \$749 limited-time offer, which includes the 360-degree camera accessory.

On Sprint, the Phone will be also available for an 18-month lease at \$14.58 a month.

Essential is also working on a home speaker of its own, aimed at challenging Amazon Echo and Google Home. Its release date remains unclear.

More information: www.essential.com/

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