

Chinese smartphone giant Xiaomi debuts in London

November 8 2018



Xiaomi hopes to move into the US market soon

China's Xiaomi unveiled the Mi 8 Pro smartphone in London Thursday, making a UK debut as the tech giant ramps up its European presence before an expected American launch next month.

Xiaomi, which is looking to gain ground on rivals Apple, Huawei and Samsung, revealed the flagship product at a launch event at the Barbican Centre.

The Mi 8 Pro will go on sale in Britain on Friday, the group announced, marking the first time that the device has been available outside China.

The phone, which retails from £499.99 (\$657, 573 euros), uses Google's Android operating system and has a fingerprint sensor in its 6.2-inch screen. It will be available from various outlets including operator Three Mobile.

Xiaomi also announced it will open an official Mi Store on November 18 at London's Westfield shopping centre in White City, having opened in Paris earlier this year.

'Milestone product'

"Mi 8 Pro is a milestone product and that's why we think it is perfect here today at a global debut here in London," said Donovan Sing, director of product management.

He added: "We are going to be bringing Mi 8 here to the UK market."

The group will also sell other hi-tech gadgets, including a fitness-tracking band and an electric scooter.

The entrepreneur behind Xiaomi, Lei Jun, describes the business he has built as a "new species" of company with a "triathlon" business model combining hardware, internet and e-commerce services.



Xiaomi is the world's fourth-largest smartphone vendor

Products range from home gadgets like smart air purifiers to non-tech items such as pillows and ballpoint pens.

Smart phones have remained at its core since its 2010 founding in Zhongguancun—China's Silicon Valley – and sales have skyrocketed, making Xiaomi the world's fourth-largest smartphone vendor at the end of last year, according to International Data Corp.

As some European consumers have pulled back from expensive outlays for an iPhone or Samsung, Xiaomi's more affordable product has proved a hit in countries like France, Italy and Spain.

"Europe is our next focus," Lei Jun told investors this summer, noting the company's explosive growth in the region had already made Xiaomi the number four smartphone seller in western Europe.

International sales now bring in more than one-third of the company's revenue.

In India, Xiaomi has cornered roughly 30 percent of the market, although growing pains there show how it can be difficult for Chinese companies to expand abroad.

Its phone chargers initially faced a relatively high defect rate because of India's power supply problems and required a redesign to increase voltage.

Scepticism

Xiaomi should avoid such issues in the United Kingdom, but could encounter scepticism over its Chinese origins and concerns over data

security.

Even after its Chinese competitor Huawei built a cyber security centre for UK officials to review its code, controversy about the company's operations and potential national security threats has continued.

Still, unlike Huawei, Xiaomi was not founded by a veteran of China's armed forces and sells handsets instead of telecom infrastructure so there may be less cause for concern.

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