

BlackBerry maker joins the fray with app store

April 1 2009, By PETER SVENSSON , AP Technology Writer



Mike Lazaridis, President and co-CEO of Research in Motion, speaks at the International CTIA Wireless show in Las Vegas, Wednesday, April 1, 2009. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

(AP) -- Research in Motion Ltd., the maker of BlackBerry phones, launched its awaited one-stop shop for add-on applications on Wednesday.

While third-party programs have long been available for BlackBerrys from many sources, the Waterloo, Ontario-based company is now following in Apple Inc.'s footsteps by creating and operating a central store. Every other major company in the "smart" phone industry is doing the same.

BlackBerry App World is available as a free download from RIM's Web site, with 1,000 applications. Users need an account with eBay Inc.'s PayPal payment service and a BlackBerry with a trackball or touch screen.

RIM Co-Chief Executive Jim Balsillie said the company is looking to strike deals with wireless carriers so that shoppers can charge their purchases to their phone bill instead of using PayPal. App World will share revenue with the carriers and allow them set up their own stores within the store.

Top applications downloaded by BlackBerry users by midday were free ones, including news browser Viigo, music service Shazam and a Facebook program.

Microsoft Corp. on Tuesday announced that carrier stores and billing will be part of its Windows Marketplace for Mobile, an applications store that will launch with new phones toward the end of the year.

Nokia Corp., the world's largest maker of cell phones, has several application stores but said earlier this year that it would combine them into one. Google Inc. runs an Android Marketplace of programs for the T-Mobile G1 phone, which will be joined by other phones running Google's Android software this year.

The launch of App World coincides with a speech by RIM's other co-CEO, Mike Lazaridis, at a cell phone trade show opening Wednesday in Las Vegas. He profiled the BlackBerry as a music-playing device, an important capability now that RIM is taking it from a business-oriented e-mail gadget to a mainstream smart phone competing with the iPhone. App World contains free Internet radio applications like Slacker and Pandora.

But Balsillie said RIM has no plans to launch a music store of its own, like Apple and Nokia have.

"The key thing is to play the enabling card to all the music stores that are out there," Balsillie said. "It would make as much sense for me to create my music store as it would be me to create my own e-mail application to compete with Yahoo and Gmail."

On the Net:

<http://www.blackberry.com/appworld>

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Citation: BlackBerry maker joins the fray with app store (2009, April 1) retrieved 19 September 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-blackberry-maker-fray-app.html>

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