

Microsoft launches Windows Phone 7 platform in Asia

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Microsoft on Tuesday launched its new mobile phone operating platform in key Asia-Pacific countries as part of a campaign to catch up with rivals in the lucrative smartphone market.

Singapore, New Zealand and Australia were picked by Microsoft and its manufacturer partners for the Asian launch of [Windows Phone 7](#) (WP7).

Samsung and [LG Electronics](#) of South Korea along with Taiwan's HTC simultaneously unveiled in Singapore a range of mobile devices that will operate on WP7, underscoring the region's crucial role in the industry.

Natasha Kwan, Microsoft's general manager for mobile communications business in the Asia-Pacific, told AFP that "Asia is the fastest growing" market and was "very, very important" to the future of the sector.

WP7 is seen by analysts as a make-or-break gamble for Microsoft, whose Windows platform has struggled against Research In Motion's BlackBerry, Apple's [iPhone](#) and Google's Android in the smartphone segment.

But Microsoft is optimistic the company's new [mobile platform](#) will herald a shift in fortunes in this part of the world.

"I would say today we are probably in a humbled position," said Kwan, "but we are so confident and optimistic with all the support that we think that the only way to go is up."

Microsoft chief executive [Steve Ballmer](#) said during a New York launch on Monday that the company was emphasising personalisation and customisation with WP7, the first significant update to its mobile operating system in 18 months.

Smartphones powered by WP7 will run email from various services -- not just Microsoft's Hotmail -- integrate calendars, contacts and social networks and allow for documents to be viewed, edited and shared using Microsoft Office.

WP7, which marks a shift for Microsoft from the enterprise market to the consumer, will also allow users to tap into the firm's Zune music player platform and access mobile versions of [Xbox 360](#) games.

According to technology research firm Gartner Microsoft's share of the global mobile operating system market will fall to 4.7 percent this year from 8.7 percent last year.

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