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Why BlackBerry could ditch its own OS for Android

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Arjun Kharpal | @ArjunKharpal
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BlackBerry's upcoming device is rumored to use Google's Android operating system (OS), in what could be the Canadian company's "last chance" to win in the smartphone market.

Philadelphia-based writer Evan Blass published images early Wednesday on Twitter, which he claimed showed the new BlackBerry smartphone model, dubbed Venice, set for release in November.



by Taboola

Evan Blass
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The big point is that it would ditch BlackBerry's own OS and run Android for the first time in its history. By adopting Android, the world's largest smartphone OS, BlackBerry is trying to appeal to a wide base of existing consumers.

"BlackBerry is taking the view that if you can't beat them, join them," Neil Mawston, executive director at Strategy Analytics, told CNBC by phone.

"BlackBerry OS is not as popular as it once was, so it's looking to move to Android to address the larger market on the consumer side."



Blackberry

Blackberry's "slider" phone

BlackBerry has a tiny share of the global smartphone market and revenue from its hardware business declined 30.6 percent year-on-year in the three months ending May 30.

One of the biggest pain points for users is the lack of apps in BlackBerry's own app store, as well as a user experience that has lagged behind Apple's iOS and Android.

BlackBerry would not confirm if Wednesday's leak was true.

"We don't comment on rumors or speculation, but we remain committed to the BlackBerry 10 operating system, which provides security and productivity benefits that are unmatched," a BlackBerry spokeswoman said.

CNBC was unable to independently verify the veracity of the photos.

'Last chance'

If the Android speculation is true, it would continue BlackBerry's shift towards opening its software and services to other operating systems.

The Canadian company opened its BlackBerry Messenger service to the other mobile operating systems last year and in March released its security and enterprise apps as well.

Analysts said that a move to Android could be make or break for the future of BlackBerry's devices division.

"From a hardware perspective this is really one last chance for BlackBerry. They have stuck to their guns sticking with their own platform and what they believed was the right thing to do, but consumers have not seen it in the same way," Dominic Sunnebo, global consumer insight director for ComTech at Kantar Worldpanel.

A preview of the upcoming device was provided during a BlackBerry press conference at the Mobile World Congress trade show in March. Few details were given, except that the device was a slider phone with a touch screen and keyboard.

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Security is key

BlackBerry has billed its OS as one of the most secure systems, which is particularly important given its pursuit of enterprise customers.

Android, however, has a bad reputation as a much less secure platform, due to the open source nature of its OS.

If BlackBerry does adopt Android, it will need to convince users it features the most secure version of the OS on the market.

"The most important is not whether the device runs Android or not, but it's about what kind of **Google** services will run on the device, and what kind of security BlackBerry will bring on to it to make Android more secure," Francisco Jeronimo, a research director at IDC, told CNBC.

"How will they secure Android like no other vendor can do? If they manage to secure Android they will address the need from enterprises and end users."



Arjun Kharpal

News Assistant, CNBC EU News Digital Team

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