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Jolla unveils first Sailfish-based smartphone, takes orders

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Finnish startup Jolla has announced its first smartphone, which shows off its Sailfish OS on a 4.5-inch screen. The device integrates the company's unique back covers with the software, allowing the look to change and new features to be added.

Jolla, which was founded by a former Nokia employees who wanted to continue the development work (http://www.pcworld.com/article/259034/remember_meego_its_coming_back_this_year_in_two_new_phones.html?tk=rel_news) the Finnish phone maker had done on the MeeGo OS, is with the introduction one big step closer to entering the ultra-competitive smartphone market.

"The earliest memories I have of things really crystalizing is from the summer of 2011. I was on holiday and there was a conference call I took on the beach, and the people that became Jolla, the founders and many of the early contributors were on that call. But to me the hard work really started in January 2012," said Marc Dillon, who recently stepped down as the company's CEO

to focus on developing the first phone.

Chameleon colors

The LTE-smartphone—which is just called Jolla, for now—is powered by a dual-core processor and has an 8-megapixel camera. It also has 16GB of integrated storage which can be expanded using an SD card.

The smartphone has been designed to look like two thin slabs that have been bonded together, and users can change the color of the back one with different snap-on covers. The back cover isn't just about the hardware design. It is integrated with the OS and can be used to add features and change the look, a concept Jolla calls "the other half."

"This is one of the most powerful things we have ... a very simple example could be that you have covers with different colors," Dillon said.

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"So you change the back of the device to a red one in the evening and a black one for the office and that would also change the user interface because there is a connection there."

The cover could also have more memory for extra content that could be used by artists to put out limited edition phones, according to Dillon.

Spotlight on Sailfish OS

The company's core offering (http://www.pcworld.com/article/2029372/where-things-stand-with-sailfish-os-and-tizen.html?tk=rel_news) is the Sailfish operating system, which Jolla hopes will lure users away from competing platforms. To help boost the availability of apps, the OS will be able to run Android applications.

The heart of the OS consists of thumbnails of opened applications on the homescreen from which users also can access multiple features directly by scrolling from side-to-side or just clicking on them to access the main feature.

"The true multitasking is working in lots of different applications. You can have a video running in a thumbnail while you are doing something else on the device," Dillon said.

The Jolla will start shipping during the fourth quarter and cost €399 ($510) including taxes in the EU. It can be preordered on Jolla's website.

The market for smartphone operating systems will get a lot more crowded this year, as the respective backers of Firefox OS, Ubuntu and Tizen are also expected to launch their first phones. The only thing Jolla has got going for it is its small size, which means it doesn't have to sell many devices to survive, according to Francisco Jeronimo, research director at IDC.

All of the new operating systems will have a very hard time even making a dent in Android and iOS' dominance. Firefox OS and Tizen are expected to have a share of less than 5 percent in five years, according to IDC, which isn't even tracking Ubuntu and Sailfish.

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