

RIM Unveils New BlackBerry to Counter Apple iPhone

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Research In Motion unveiled a new BlackBerry aimed at wooing consumers away from Apple's iPhone and other rivals, but analysts said the handset won't blow away the competition.

Even though the main features of the BlackBerry Torch, including a touchscreen and slideout keyboard, were well-known within the industry, investors registered their disappointment, driving RIM's Toronto-listed shares down 4 percent.

The Torch will go on sale in the United States on August 12 for \$199.99 with a two-year contract ? about the same price as an iPhone. The new BlackBerry uses a revamped operating system and has a faster and easier-to-use Web browser.

Underscoring RIM's intention to compete head to head with the iPhone, the Waterloo, Ontario-based company will launch the phone in the United States with AT&T Inc, the same carrier that has exclusive U.S. rights to the iPhone.

Analysts at Tuesday's launch event in New York said the Torch does not represent a major advance but that its consumer-friendly features were enough to help RIM to catch up to rivals.

"RIM is playing catch-up. This is clearly the upgrade for BlackBerry users, but otherwise not a lot here is super exciting," Altimeter analyst Michael Gartenberg said. The Torch does not represent a "leap forward", but will help RIM compete with rivals such as iPhone and Google Inc's Android software, used in phones from several vendors including Motorola Inc, said NPD analyst Ross Rubin.

"This gets the experience competitive again ? if they can do that with the efficiency and stability that RIM is known for, then it's a positive," Rubin said. Some analysts have said the Torch's success will depend how heavily it is promoted by AT&T, which said it collaborated with RIM on the device for thousands of hours.

AT&T described the device as the best BlackBerry ever but declined to say how much advertising the company will spend on the phone or how it would compare to the amount of money it spends on iPhone advertising.

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