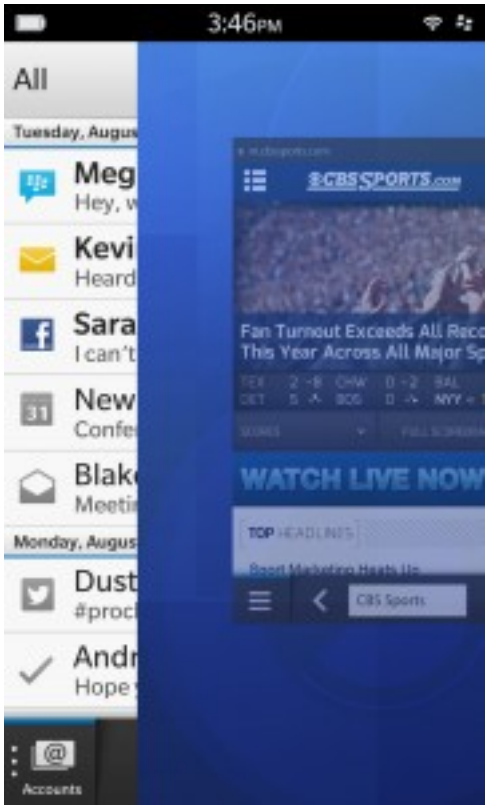
10 Reasons To Hope For BlackBerry 10

Forbes



[1]It’s been a tough couple of years for Research in Motion. The BlackBerry maker still has a faithful following of physical-keyboard loving users, but Apple [2], Samsung and cheaper smartphone makers from Asia have smashed RIM’s market share. Its stock has fallen almost 90% in the last five years; last quarter it posted another weak set of financial results [3]. Some say BlackBerry 10, the new phone RIM will launch on Jan. 30th, could be a make-or-break device.

Screenshot of an app page being swiped to the right to "peek" at notifications in BlackBerry Hub.

So what’s it like? RIM gave *Forbes* a demo of the phone’s software at CES 2013 [4], unveiling some impressive features and factoids. Here are 10 of them, with a video of the demo below.

1) First a crucial factoid: **carriers apparently like it.** So far 150 of them from around the world are testing BlackBerry 10 in their labs, according to CMO Frank Boulben, which means they’ll almost certainly carry the phone. He expects 200 carriers to offer BB 10 by the summer of 2013.

2) The phone is launching with more than **70,000 available apps**, along with new features to BlackBerry Messenger that RIM will disclose at launch.

3) The phone **takes away a physical "home" buttons** — a bit like Nokia's [5] Lumia phones. It relies on lots of swiping gestures and shortcuts for one-handed use by on-the-go business types.

4) The mobile platform, based software by QNX, allows users to have **two personas on the device** – one for work and one for private life, with separate background images and a password that can stop kids from accidentally calling someone's boss. Users can swap between the two with a single gesture, and decide what content is deemed personal and accessible, or private and professional on the same device.

5) A new feature called **BlackBerry Hub**. This is a neat amalgamation of all notifications that users access by swiping in an "L" shape, up and to the left. When writing an email and a new one comes in, users can also swipe slightly to "peek" at the content, before continuing with their email. No need to press a button or delete any draft of the email.

6) BlackBerry Hub's **integration with** Facebook **[6], Twitter, Foursquare and LinkedIn** — with potential for other developers to allow their apps to integrate with the Hub too. Users don't have to go into any of these applications to update their profiles or comment on these networks, but do it all in the Hub.

7) Quick **context and aggregation**. BlackBerry has created an apparently seamless system that allows you to get relevant information on people in your calendar. Swipe down to see the next appointment, then tap to see previous meetings you've had with the person, or what they last said to you in an email, or what a Google [7] search on them brings up, or their LinkedIn profile — all within a couple of windows and without opening a browser. "It follows your train of thought," says Boulben, who described this experience as "BlackBerry Flow."

8) A **keyboard that learns**. This applies to the touch-screen version of BlackBerry 10, since RIM is bringing out a second BB 10 device with a physical keyboard. The application scans every email or instant message you've sent and builds an algorithm to better predict what words you'll type — rumor has it RIM partnered with A.I. startup SwiftKey on this. Predicted words hover on the "frets" between the key rows, and you select them by flicking up with your thumb (see video below). Swipe down on the keyboard to get punctuation symbols; swipe backwards across the keyboard to erase a word. If you tend to type between the O and P, the keyboard will learn this and shift the touch actuator to lie between the two keys.

9) **Language**. Start typing the word "je" and the BlackBerry 10 keyboard automatically suggests French words. "There is nothing more frustrating than writing in one language and being corrected in another," says Boulben, who is French.

10.) A few other things **we don't know about**. Boulben said RIM would unveil a couple of extra features at its Jan. 30 announcement, and the handset he showed me was not the finished product.

Overall, RIM is eagerly promoting BlackBerry 10 — it's not keeping the details about it under wraps like Apple. In fact, Boulben has been in 32 countries in the last four months to promote the hell out of this phone. And for good reason.

By summer 2013 we should know if any of these new features will help RIM stay in the game.

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