Orders of Keyboard BlackBerry Start in Canada

BY ROB GILLIES, Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — The maker of the BlackBerry phone said Tuesday that a modern smartphone with a physical keyboard will be available in Canada in the coming weeks as major wireless companies started taking advance orders.

Details on when the BlackBerry Q10 will go on sale elsewhere will be announced soon, Research In Motion Ltd. said. Advance orders are already being accepted in the U.K.

The BlackBerry, pioneered in 1999, had been the dominant smartphone for on-the-go business people and other consumers before the iPhone debuted in 2007 and showed that phones can handle much more than email and phone calls. RIM faced numerous delays modernizing its operating system with the BlackBerry 10. During that time, it had to cut more than 5,000 jobs and saw shareholder wealth decline by more than $70 billion.

RIM surprised Wall Street last month by returning to profitability and shipping about 1 million touch-screen BlackBerry Z10 phones in the most recent quarter, which ended March 2. It will take several quarters, though, to know whether RIM is on a path toward a successful turnaround. RIM had just entered the critical U.S. market with the Z10 phone, and the more anticipated Q10 keyboard phone won't be on sale until late May or June because of testing by U.S. wireless companies.

The U.S. delay in selling the new keyboard BlackBerry complicates RIM's efforts to hang on to customers tempted by Apple's iPhone and a range of devices running Google Inc.'s Android operating system. Even as the BlackBerry has fallen behind rivals in recent years, many BlackBerry users have stayed loyal because they prefer a physical keyboard over the touch screen found on the iPhone and most Android devices. The temptations to switch grow with each additional delay, despite favorable reviews for BlackBerry 10 operating system.

Canadian carriers Rogers Communications Inc. and Telus Corp. both said Tuesday that advance orders are under way for the keyboard Q10 device, but neither would provide an exact date for when the Q10 would be available. Telus is offering the phone one a $199 with a three-year service agreement or $700 without a contract.

The all-touch-screen Z10 launched in Canada and other markets earlier this year and in the United States last month.

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