

Smartwatches Abound. But Who Really Wants One?

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Computerized wristwatches that display message alerts and weather updates are abound this holiday season: Consumer electronics companies are trying to persuade you to add these smartwatches to your shopping lists.

Samsung and Sony have devices out, and Qualcomm has one coming before the holidays. Apple is believed to be making one, and a new report says Google is developing one, too.

Why the big push for smartwatches? It's not coming from consumers, says Jonathan Gaw, a research manager at IDC. Rather, it's a product in search of a market — and an expensive one at that.

"We've had smartwatches for a while, and while the capabilities and technology have gotten better, this is still not something that people are clamoring for," Gaw says. "The idea that it would ramp up for the holidays was always kind of a stretch."

That hasn't stopped gadget makers from trying. Companies are under pressure to create a new source of buzz now that consumers are no longer wowed by the latest smartphones and tablet computers. Many people already have those devices, and the new ones out this year are evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

Gaw says many gadget makers see an opportunity to jump in with a smartwatch, before a behemoth like Apple is able get its rumored iWatch ready.

Last month, Samsung Electronics started selling the \$300 Galaxy Gear in the U.S. It

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works with selected Samsung smartphones to display email and text alerts. There's a camera on the strap for low-resolution photos and a speakerphone on the watch to make calls while leaving your phone in the pocket. You can install apps for additional functionality, such as tracking fitness activities and playing games, though there are only a handful of apps available for now.

Sony's SmartWatch 2 is cheaper, at \$200. Unlike the Gear, it works with a variety of Android phones, not just Sony's. But it doesn't let you make phone calls directly through the wristwatch. You can answer calls using the watch, but you need a Bluetooth wireless headset linked to the phone if you don't want to hold it to your ear.

Qualcomm, meanwhile, plans to start selling Toq before the holidays. It, too, will work with several Android devices.

Another smartwatch getting attention is the Pebble, which comes from a startup that raised more than \$10 million through the fundraising site Kickstarter. It notifies you of incoming calls, texts and emails.

Apple isn't likely to release its iWatch before next year, given that no mention was made of it at the company's product showcase last week.

As for Google, The Wall Street Journal cited unnamed people familiar with the matter on Tuesday in reporting that the Internet search company is in late-stage development on a smartwatch which could be ready for mass production within months.

Samsung and Sony executives say they've designed their watches to give people ready access to information they would normally check on their phones, reducing the need to constantly pull out the phones.

Only Qualcomm seems to be acknowledging that there's no real consumer demand for smartwatches yet. The company says it's trying to showcase what's possible, so other manufacturers will take the concept and build better products — using Qualcomm's display technology and other components.

In a September briefing with The Associated Press, Samsung executives said the company has a history of taking risks. Samsung notes that people were skeptical about its Note phones with big screens, too, but now several other manufacturers are making Android phones with bigger screens.

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