Samsung Makes Quiet Push for New Mobile OS

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Seoul, South Korea (AP) — Most mobile phone users have never heard of Tizen. Neither have car owners or anyone with a fridge.

Samsung Electronics Co. wants to change that.

The South Korean electronics giant is in a quiet push to make its Tizen operating system a part of the technology lexicon as familiar as Google's Android or Apple's iOS. Its ambition doesn't stop there. Samsung sees the software in your car, fridge and television too.

The first developer conference in Asia for Tizen wrapped up Tuesday after a two-day run, bringing together app developers and Tizen backers from Samsung, Intel and mobile operators.

Samsung did not announce a Tizen phone, but it made a pitch for developers to create apps for the mobile operating system that is yet to be seen in the market. Samsung promised to give out $4 million cash to the creators of the best Tizen apps.

Samsung supplied about one third of the smartphones sold worldwide in the third quarter, nearly all of them running on Google's Android. Its early bet on Google's free-of-charge operating system served Samsung well and the company's rise to top smartphone seller also helped Android become the most used mobile platform in the world. According to Localytics, 63 percent of all Android mobile devices in use are made by Samsung.

But while Samsung was wildly successful with selling its Galaxy phones and tablets, it had little success in locking Galaxy device users into music, messaging and other Samsung services. Google, however, benefited from more people using its search

service, Google Play app and other Google mobile applications on Galaxy smartphones. Owners of Galaxy devices remain for the most part a slave to Google's Android update schedule and its rules.

About nine in every 10 smartphone users are tied to either Google's Android or Apple's iPhone ecosystems, generating profit for Google and Apple every time they purchase a game or application on their smartphone.

That is partly why Samsung wants to expand its control beyond hardware to software, by building its own mobile operating system.

"With only hardware, its influence is limited," said Kang Yeen-kyu, an associate research fellow at state-run Korea Information Society Development Institute. "Samsung's goal is to establish an ecosystem centered on Samsung."

The consolidation of global technology companies in the last few years reflects such trends. Apple has always made its own operating system for the iPhone. Google Inc. acquired Motorola Mobility in 2011 and Microsoft Corp. announced in September its plan to buy Nokia Corp., leaving Samsung the only major player in the smartphone market that does not make its own operating system.

Samsung executives told analysts last week that the company plans to beef up its software competitiveness through acquisitions and splashing cash on the development of mobile content and services.

But Tizen's start appears bumpy. Samsung said earlier this year the first Tizen phone would hit the market this fall but it has not materialized. Samsung declined to comment on release schedules.

Even though Choi Jong-deok, Samsung's executive vice president overseeing Tizen, said a launch of Tizen phone or televisions will happen "very shortly," analysts said Samsung is unlikely to reveal the first Tizen device until February of next year, when the company said it will announce winners of its Tizen app contest.

During the developer conference, Samsung gave more clues about how its first Tizen device would look and revealed that it has recently launched a Tizen-based camera in South Korea.

Tizen would work across a vast range of consumer electronics made by Samsung, encompassing mobile devices, televisions, fridges as well as wearable devices. The mobile operating system will also work with automobiles. Samsung and Intel said Toyota Motor Corp. and Jaguar Land Rover are working together to bring Tizen OS to vehicles.

"You can build an application once and relatively easily move from device to device," Mark Skarpness, director of systems engineering at Intel Corp., told the conference.

Samsung and Intel are also aiming to capture a bigger share of business in

emerging markets where demand for cheaper smartphones is growing. Skarpness said future versions of Tizen will support lower-end phones, the same direction that Google is taking with its latest version of Android, KitKat.

"I got an impression that Tizen was benchmarking Android," said Park Minhyung, a developer who attended the conference. "Speakers at the sessions said that they adopted strong features from Android. But with Android's place well established in the market, I wonder how Tizen would undermine the front runner."

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