Cell Phone Sales up 22 Percent as Economy Recovers

NEW YORK (AP) -- The number of cell phones sold worldwide rose 22 percent in the first quarter compared with a year earlier, as both the economic recovery and an appetite for smart phones drove a rebound in sales, according to research firm IDC.

Research in Motion Ltd., the Canadian maker of the BlackBerry smart phones, broke into the top five of the world's largest phone makers for the first time. Manufacturers shipped 295 million phones in the quarter, IDC said. The report is based on publicly reported figures from the major phone manufacturers.

Although growth from last year's first quarter was strong, the comparison was with a very weak period, when the recession shrank sales. The recovery for the rest of the year won't look as strong, said Kevin Restivo, senior research analyst at IDC. For all of 2010, the firm expects an 11 percent increase over 2009.

Nokia Corp. kept its place as the world's largest maker of phones, followed by Samsung Electronics Co. and LG Electronics Inc.

However, Schaumburg, Ill.-based Motorola Inc. dropped out of the top five and was replaced by RIM, which was tied with Sony Ericsson for fourth place. Motorola has seen a multiyear drop in phone shipments continue and has been trying to turn its fortunes around by focusing on smart phones.

Just under the top five lurks Apple Inc., which had higher sales than Motorola for the first time in the first quarter. If iPhone sales keep growing at their current pace, Apple may well become one of the world's top five manufacturers later this year.

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