

Samsung eyes rebound with Galaxy S8 phones, virtual assistant

NEW YORK, US: Samsung on Wednesday unveiled its new Galaxy S8 smartphones, incorporating the virtual assistant Bixby, as it seeks to rebound from a chaotic handset recall and a corruption scandal.



The South Korean giant's mobile chief, DJ Koh, told a New York event the Galaxy S8 and S8+ handsets marked "a new era of smartphone design."

The Galaxy S8 release comes after Samsung was [forced to recall its Note 7 phones](#) for catching fire due to overheating batteries.

Hammered global reputation

The debacle cost the South Korean company billions of dollars in lost profit and hammered its global reputation and credibility, during a torrid period that has also seen it embroiled in a corruption scandal.

Its vice-chairman Lee Jae-Yong, heir to the parent Samsung group, [has been arrested and indicted for bribery](#), along with four other senior executives, in connection with a graft scandal that saw ex-president Park Geun-Hye impeached.

Samsung apologized to consumers for the recall and was forced to postpone the S8 launch. Its investigation blamed the problems on faulty batteries.

The firm later embarked on a campaign to restore its battered reputation, placing full-page advertisements in US newspapers that admitted it "fell short" on its promises.

The tech giant says it has also come up with elaborate step-by-step safety verification procedures for future products to prevent similar disasters.

S8 with upgraded digital assistant, Bixby

Fitted with screens of 5.8 and 6.2 inches, the two handsets include Samsung's upgraded digital assistant Bixby, competing in a crowded field that includes Apple's Siri, Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa.

The most striking feature of the new phones is what Samsung dubs an "infinity display" - an expanded glass screen that covers the entire front of the device and appears to curve seamlessly around its edges.

Bixby marks a further step into services for the smartphone vendor, allowing users to shop, search for images and get details about nearby places with image recognition technology and geolocation.

"We've built intelligence into the camera," said Samsung's services chief Sriram Thodla. "If you see something you want to buy, just point the camera at it and Bixby will find it from one of our partners."

The digital assistant will also enhance the phone's capabilities as a remote control for connected home devices, Thodla said.

Challenging the latest Apple iPhones

The South Korean electronics giant late last year bought Viv, an artificial intelligence startup with co-founders who were part of the team that built virtual assistant Siri, which Apple bought some seven years ago.

As Samsung's top-line handsets, the Galaxy S8 models will challenge the latest Apple iPhones. The new phones will be available from 21 April 2017, Samsung said.

In the US market, they will be sold through major carriers and retailers, with unlocked devices priced from \$725.

Gear virtual reality headset

As part of its launch, Samsung will be including its Gear virtual reality headset to customers pre-ordering the handsets.

Analysts offered generally positive reviews while expressing caution over the high price tag.

"The price of the new phones is up to \$100 higher than their predecessors and almost all of the premium smartphones they'll be competing with, which feels like a big risk," said Jan Dawson of Jackdaw Research.

Dawson said Samsung is betting "that its phones will justify a higher price, whereas it could have used these new phones as a way to drive higher sales after a couple of years of stagnation."

Bob O'Donnell of Technalysis Research tweeted that "The phone as a true pocket computer is starting to get more real."

Source: AFP

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