

BlackBerry's new phone targets business users

OTTAWA, CANADA: BlackBerry has unveiled its newest smartphone with a full physical keyboard and a large screen and says it will return to its roots by targeting business users.



BlackBerry's new Passport version is aimed at the enterprise community with a quirky design that allows for bigger displays and an easy-to-use Qwerty keyboard. Image: [Crackberry](#)

The BlackBerry Passport, named because of its approximate size, is designed to win back key corporate users after the struggling Canadian company was effectively knocked out of the highly competitive consumer smartphone market dominated by Apple and Samsung.

The Passport, unveiled at events in London, Dubai and Toronto, is the company's first global launch of a new product under Chief Executive John Chen.

Chen admitted, however, that it had already been in the works before he took over last November, after the company posted huge losses and shed thousands of jobs.

His contribution, he quipped, was that "I didn't kill it."

"The smartphone is packed with power and a lot of groundbreaking stuff," Chen added at the Toronto launch that included an appearance by hockey legend Wayne Gretzky.

"I've been a BlackBerry user from day one," Gretzky declared onstage.

Full keyboard and huge screen

Key features include a full keyboard, up to 30 hours of battery life, new productivity apps, a 1440 x 1440 pixel screen with 60 characters per line to make it closest to reading a paperback novel, a "virtual assistant" with voice-recognition, and a speakerphone with louder, clearer and sharper sound than the competition.

"The company's turnaround strategy is going back to the basics of enterprise, security, collaboration and communication," Chen said.

The new handset caught the attention of analysts with its quirky design and high-end specifications.

"The Passport looks ridiculous and I expected it to be awful. Instead I was shocked by how good it is for productivity," tweeted Avi Greengart, who follows the industry for the research firm Current Analysis.

Greengart added that the Passport is not a good standalone phone, and its shape makes it a strange second phone. But it can be worth it."

New BlackBerry Classic still coming

The Passport is the third of four new phones to be launched by BlackBerry this year, after a budget Z3 smartphone was launched in Indonesia (one of its last bastions), and a Porsche-designed phone sold in Dubai.

The Z3 was the first to be produced from the Canadian firm's partnership with Taiwanese technology company Foxconn, which also makes gadgets for Apple.



BlackBerry's John Chen says the phone is ideally for business users and has a host of new and useful applications. Image: Blackberry

The partnership involved transferring manufacturing and inventory management to the Taiwanese company, while allowing BlackBerry to focus on software and services.

Chen said the new BlackBerry Classic - which will be similar to the Passport - will be launched between now and the end of the year.

The Passport, using the updated BlackBerry 10.3 operating system, will be priced at \$599 without a contract in the United States - slightly below the contract-free price of Apple's new iPhone and high-end smartphones from Samsung.

It will be released in stores within two weeks.

Source: AFP via I-Net Bridge

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