



BlackBerry 10

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On January 30 of this year, the company formerly known as Research In Motion introduced the first BlackBerry 10 (BB10) devices. The BlackBerry Z10 is the first to market, a completely touchscreen smartphone rivaling iPhone and Android devices. Reviewers have generally been impressed with the product, but is it the right choice for those of us in ministry?

What is BlackBerry 10?

The BlackBerry was the first smartphone with a rabidly loyal fanbase. Until the iPhone came along, having a Blackberry hanging from your belt was the coolest you could be with a phone. For most of its life, the Blackberry was clearly targeted at business users, with executives and financial professionals being particularly drawn to the devices. In 2009, the company decided to chase the consumer smartphone market that Apple had awakened. Those efforts were largely fruitless (sorry, bad pun).

RIM first got into mobile device business in the late 1990s with the RIM Inter@ctive pagers. These were pagers with a keyboard so that the user could respond to a page. In 1999, the company introduced the BlackBerry e-mail service, and before long, the devices were being called BlackBerries. I remember being at an industry event in Canada in 2001 where RIM's CEO tried to demonstrate a voice call using a prototype BlackBerry "phone." It actually was one of RIM's two-way pagers retrofitted with a headset. That demonstration didn't go well, but

by early 2002, they had worked out the kinks and introduced the first BlackBerry “phone.”

Although, the devices could now make telephone calls, the BlackBerry has always been a messaging device at heart. I carried a BlackBerry for about a year, and since I love e-mail, it was a solid phone for me. It was interesting to me that e-mails, text messages, voice mails, even missed phone calls all showed up in the inbox.

RIM has done a great job of making the BlackBerry attractive to enterprise customers. A key to this has been a product RIM calls the BlackBerry Enterprise Server, but everyone simply calls it BES (pronounced “bez”). For corporate users, BES is what allows them to access their corporate e-mail, calendars, and address books on the BlackBerry. BES integrates with Microsoft Exchange, IBM Lotus Notes/Domino, etc. But what enterprise CIOs love about BES are the security features. BES supports IT policies, encrypts data across the network, and can remotely wipe business information from a lost or stolen BlackBerry. These features have helped RIM hold on to business customers who otherwise would’ve immediately bolted for the iPhone or Android. However, over time many of these features have become available for competing devices.

The BlackBerry platform had always attracted developers of business applications, but the platform couldn’t compete with the iPhone App Store in attracting developers of entertainment and consumer apps. It also failed to excite most consumers. RIM tried to introduce touchscreen-only smartphones in 2008, but the BlackBerry operating system was still messaging-centric and struggled to compete with iOS and Android.

Realizing that a serious overhaul was necessary if BlackBerry was going to be relevant in the smartphone market, RIM acquired operating system company QNX in 2010, establishing the

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foundation for what would become BlackBerry 10. Unfortunately, it took RIM three years to bring any BlackBerry 10 devices to market.

BlackBerry 10 is the name of the operating system used by the latest generation of BlackBerry devices. It is a gesture-driven, multi-tasking system. BlackBerry has retained its messaging-centricity, with the BlackBerry Hub application being the central collection point for e-mails, text messages, voicemails, missed calls, system updates, Twitter messages, Facebook updates, and LinkedIn messages all being integrated into a single message flow.

Why is BlackBerry 10 attractive to us?

For those of us that live and die by e-mail, RIM has always made a great product. BB10 marries that best-in-the-world messaging experience with an exciting, modern mobile operating system capable of running fun and exciting applications.

As a modern smartphone, the Z10 has a big crisp screen, a powerful processor, a great camera, and good network connectivity. The new operating system matches up well with iOS

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and Android. It is true multi-tasking and makes good use of the touchscreen.

What should we be concerned about?

The biggest danger in adopting BB10 is the risk that the company may not survive.

RIM's situation is very similar to where Palm was a couple of years ago. Like RIM, Palm was an early smartphone success story. Palm was originally in the PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) business, but after 3Com acquired the company, the founders left and started Handspring. Handspring licensed the PalmOS software and in 2002 introduced the Treo line of smartphones. The Treo 300 became one of the first broadly successful smartphones in the US market. Handspring later merged back into Palm. According to ChangeWave Research, as late as 2006, Palm was the smartphone marketshare leader with 36% share.

However, Palm lacked the corporate stickiness that BES provided for RIM. With the launch of the iPhone, followed by Android devices, Palm customers quickly made the switch. By 2009, Palm's share had dropped to 7%. In contrast, BlackBerry continued to gain share, reaching 43% in 2008, before Apple and Google's wooing of the corporate market began to erode RIM's position.

In early 2009, Palm introduced an exciting new touchscreen operating system, webOS. Unfortunately, it was too little too late. The company struggled to raise enough funding to stay in business and was acquired by HP in July 2010.

Just over a year later, HP announced that it would discontinue production of all webOS devices.

Thanks to its strength with corporate buyers, RIM hasn't yet met the same fate. However, according to Gartner, BlackBerry only had 2% market share in 2012. BB10 was delayed several times in reaching market. The company has struggled and had to lay off thousands of employees, and the Co-CEOs of the company were replaced last year.

The general sense is that, although the Z10 is a good device, it's probably not a great enough device to attract swarms of consumers and app developers. Bottom line, the device may appeal to long-time BlackBerry loyalists who have waited patiently for the company to bring a modern smartphone to market, but I doubt the device will attract many new fans. Early sales reports are disappointing and the company's stock is down since the launch.

If you're willing to live with a device that may have limited applications available, and whose maker runs the risk of going out of business, and if you love BlackBerry's messaging-centric approach, BB10 may be a great solution for you and could make you more effective in your ministry.

It is my hope and prayer that these articles on the power and danger of technology will encourage you in your daily walk with Christ. Whether it is Java, the printing press, radio, television, personal computers, the Internet, the Cloud, smartphones, or augmented reality, new technologies continue to advance our ability to know God and to serve Him, wherever we go.

Russ McGuire is an executive for a Fortune 100 company and the founder/co-founder of three technology start-ups. His latest entrepreneurial venture is Hschooler.net (<http://hschooler.net>), a social network for Christian families (especially homeschoolers) which is being built and run by seven young men under Russ' direction.



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