

Asian firms challenge Apple with snazzy new smartphones

BARCELONA, SPAIN: Several big Asian phone companies launched new high-end smartphones and other wireless gizmos on Sunday, hoping to challenge US giant Apple in a big year for wireless gadgets...



Barcelona, Spain... where Asian phone makers have made their challenge to Apple. (Image: Public Domain)

Samsung, fellow South Korean firm LG and hip Chinese maker HTC timed their smartphone launches to grab the attention on the eve of the Mobile World Congress, the world's biggest telecoms trade fair, in Barcelona, Spain.

In a head-on challenge to Apple's popular iPhone 6 which was released last year, Samsung came out fighting on Sunday with the Galaxy S6, a smartphone with a touchscreen that curves around the edges and has a wireless charger.

It also presented the larger S6 Edge, a "phablet" somewhere between a tablet and a phone in size.

LG unveiled a new top-line phone with a curved back to sit snugly in the palm, the LG Flex 2, as well as a range of four new mid-range smartphones and two new luxury internet-connected watches.

At a noisy stage presentation before a crowd of hundreds, HTC chief executive Peter Chou meanwhile presented the HTC One M9, with a grey metallic handset moulded from a single piece of aluminium.

HTC also revealed a new connected "fitness band" body-monitoring bracelet and a virtual reality headset that it said it hoped to sell commercially by the end of the year.

Apple as usual was staying away from the Barcelona show but was reported to be preparing a coup with the launch next month of its new Apple Watch, reflecting a major trend in wearable gadgets this year.

The chief executive of Samsung's mobile division, J.K. Shin, said the company aimed to set "a new standard to drive the global mobile agenda", claiming his phones had the fastest processors and most high-performance cameras on the market.

Samsung is the world's biggest seller of smartphones but saw its world market share fall last year from 34% to 20%, according to a report by tech consultancy IDC.

"There's a risk Samsung's 2015 flagship devices are insufficient for the company to regain brand leadership among consumers and businesses looking for high-end smartphone experiences," said Thomas Husson, an analyst at another consultancy, Forrester, in a note after Sunday's launch.

"Samsung's lack of software DNA will still prevent it from delivering truly differentiated service experiences like Apple does."

Also present at the congress were two of the world's other biggest-selling smartphone makers, Chinese companies Huawei and Xiaomi.

Joining in the rush for big launches on the eve of the trade fair, Huawei unveiled its first "smartwatch", a round luxury design that, like LG's, can display incoming call and message alerts.

The companies refused to cite consumer prices for the new products.

Top-end smartphones typically cost several hundred dollars (euros).

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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