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I cover agitators and innovators in mobile.

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10 Predictions For The Mobile Industry In 2013

As we enter 2013 it's only fitting to present a few predictions for the sector that's become as important to established tech as technology itself to the makers of cars, consumer goods and services. With a little help from analysts, entrepreneurs and researchers, here are 10 forecasts on the big changes we'll see for telecommunications and mobile technology in 2013:

Smartphone Evolution (Photo credit: Phil Roeder)

1. HTML5 will make a comeback, helping to make smartphones cheaper.

HTML5 is a new web standard letting apps run on any mobile operating system (iOS, Android, etc.) through a web browser. Though it kicked off a while ago, the infrastructure wasn't ready, says Tomer Kagan, chief executive officer of Quixey, a search engine for mobile apps. "But HTML5 will make a comeback because of the release of Firefox and Tizen." These are open-sourced, mobile operating systems that Mozilla and Samsung, respectively, are expected to launch in 2013. That could lead to cheaper smartphones, since HTML5 apps can run on these systems with no need for a browser, and they are cheaper for developers to build. "The costs of running a developer community and app store also go away," says Kagan. On top of that, "more users internationally will have access to a greater web than ever before." Essentially, as other mobile operating systems compete against the 90%-marketshare of Android-and-iOS, more developers will push to make apps work across different platforms, using HTML5. One caveat: apps created *natively* for Android or iOS still tend to perform faster than those on HTML5, meaning the walled gardens or "ecosystems" of mobile-operating systems and native apps may continue for at least a couple more years.

2. Companies will continue to launch dark, rectangular slabs of plastic.

Surprise! Device makers will keep bringing out the same, tried and tested form factor for smartphones: dark, plastic slabs in roughly three sizes of phone, "phablet" and tablet. "There will be new launches of the same, boring form factor," says Jefferson Wang, a mobile consultant with IBB Consulting. Manufacturers will still make incremental innovations. "The finish doesn't have to be matt plastic," says Wang. "It could have a texture or a gloss or different finishes." That said, Samsung has long been rumored to be working on foldable AMOLED screens that wrap around the borders of a smartphone, so it could also release something along those lines in 2013.

3. A few firms that were late to the mobile game will launch their own phones.

One of the big criticisms made towards Facebook has been its slow move into mobile, but multiple reports suggest the company is working on launching its own Facebook-branded phone in collaboration with HTC, and it's likely under pressure to finally put something out in 2013. Microsoft and Amazon have reportedly contracted Foxconn, the sprawling Taiwanese manufacturer of iPhones and other handsets, to manufacture their own smartphones for a launch in 2013. Meanwhile a large Internet company with mobile ambitions could buy a struggling device maker, *a la* Google's purchase of Motorola Mobility in 2011. Among the possible targets: HTC, LG, Sony Mobile, Research in Motion and Nokia, who would most likely be bought out by its partner, Microsoft.

4. Wireless technology will give new life to products that were almost killed by smartphones.

Remember watches? Point-and-shoot digital cameras? Day planners? We don't see very much of these products anymore because they've been replaced by smartphones, with their confluence of multiple services into one piece of plastic. But some of these old industries are coming back from the brink by incorporating the same wireless technology we find in smartphones, says IBB's Wang. Expect to see more wireless-enabled wearable devices in 2013, including watches that track your fitness levels, (like the bluetooth-enabled smart watch that Apple and Intel are reportedly working on) or digital cameras that can connect to to the web and take a better photo than your smartphone can. In 2012 Samsung launched its 16-megapixel, Galaxy digital camera that runs on Android and edits photos, then uploads them directly to Facebook. Devices mainly need to support a mobile operating system like Android, thus allowing them to connect to web protocols. "Even fabric can have wireless capabilities that change based on your emotion and physical state," says Wang.

5. Samsung will continue to dominate.

The world of mobile devices has had its kings in global sales, innovation and the high-quality products, with Motorola, Nokia, RIM and most recently Apple each having their few-years reign. But Samsung rose through the ranks in 2012, dethroning Nokia as the world's biggest mobile phone maker, and it will continue to dominate the world of consumer mobile products in 2013. It is reaping the benefits of Android's growth in most major markets outside of the U.S., and its strong distribution channels, good relationships with carriers and varied price range will help keep the company on top.

6. So will Foxconn.

It's well known that sales of tablets are on track to overtake those of desktop PCs and even laptops. So who's benefiting? Taiwan-based Foxconn is one of the world's biggest mobile handset manufacturers, producing devices for Apple, Dell, Nokia and Sony, with recent reports suggesting it is now prepping phones for Microsoft and Amazon. The company will also continue to benefit significantly from orders from Apple, whose supply chain partners are reportedly working through the traditional Chinese New Year holiday to keep up with demand for the iPad Mini and iPhone 5.

7. Microsoft and (especially) Research in Motion will struggle to sell phones.

Smartphone sales continue to be a two-horse race between Android and Apple's iOS, with Microsoft's Windows Phone and RIM's BlackBerry fighting for third place in mobile "ecosystems." RIM's future will rest largely

on the fate of it's forthcoming BlackBerry 10 phone, launching in January 2013 and offering a new "peek-and-go" method of interacting with a device. But Microsoft stands a better chance of staying firmly in the No. 3 spot, thanks to the support of several large device manufacturers like Nokia, Samsung and HTC. These firms are keen to see Windows Phone push back against Google's dominance with Android, something Nokia CEO Stephen Elop alluded to when he first partnered Nokia with Windows Phone. Windows Phone's colorful tiles are are also being marketed everywhere, from music videos, to "Gossip Girl," to billboards. But pressure is also coming from smaller challengers:

8. Dark horses will challenge the third ecosystem.

Smartphones are becoming as much about software as they are about incremental changes to the shape of their rectangular shape. That leaves room for upstart companies to develop new operating systems and launch phones, challenging Microsoft and RIM by taking fourth place in the mobile OS rankings. One dark horse is Tizen, the forthcoming open-source mobile operating system that the Linux Foundation is developing with Samsung and Intel. The other is Mozilla's Firefox OS, an open-sourced mobile operating system. Research firm Strategy Analytics expects Firefox OS to capture 1% of global smartphone shipments in 2013, by targeting entry-level smartphone users, but it could end up taking more. The Finnish mobile company Jolla is also preparing to launch its open-sourced mobile OS Sailfish in 2013, a descendant of the Meego OS that Nokia abandoned in favor of Windows Phone, and will start by launching a phone in China.

9. Carriers will lose more control to software providers.

Network providers like AT&T, Verizon and Vodafone were once the kings of mobile telephony, each with their own, profitable empire, a one-stop-shop for subscribing to a mobile phone and broadband. Now their power is being circumvented in all sorts of ways: new players like FreedomPop are providing cheaper WiFi access for the home, mobile messaging companies like WhatsApp and GroupMe are eating away at their SMS revenues. Meanwhile, Internet giants know far more about users than the providers like AT&T, who were once king of user information like billing and network habits. Now Facebook, Apple, Google and smaller app developers are collecting nuanced details like location data and address-book info, and across a wider breadth of people (more than a billion in the case of Facebook).

In the coming years, carriers will maintain their crucial advantage of providing spectrum for calls and data connectivity through 3G and 4G. But even that may see some encroachment from the likes of Google. The company is already experimenting with its one-gigabit fiber network in Kansas City, offering lightening-fast broadband and TV services. Who knows if in 2013 Google doesn't buy spectrum (it has reportedly been in talks with the Dish Network) and experiment on a small market like Kansas City. It might be hard to imagine Google becoming *that* big, but "there is a collision course between the Internet and the mobile space," says IBB's Wang. We'll always need network carriers like AT&T, but signs point to them going the way of regulated utilities like your electric and water company, rather than service providers that know everything about you.

10. Big demand for big data

It's a little cliche to include "big data" in a list of 2013 predictions, but a few companies will successfully take advantage of the need to contextualize the glut of data and web-enabled apps that run on mobile devices according to Juniper Research. In so doing, they'll be able to make valuable predictions of consumer behavior — notwithstanding a host of privacy concerns.

11. Bonus prediction: The definition of "mobile" will broaden.

Today the smartest machine in many homes, besides a desktop computer or laptop, is a smartphone. Everything else from the TV to the toaster, are dumb by comparison. But that's changing, as more devices are enabled with wireless connectivity as per prediction No. 4. The smartphone is also becoming the hub for them all — used to turn off the lights or control the temperature of a house. More devices will go mobile, augmenting the very definition of the term, and the smartphone will become increasingly important as the "mothership" that controls them all.

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