Why Android is beating Apple

Kasey Panetta, Associate Editor

It wasn’t so long ago the Apple was *the* phone to have. Yes, there were the holdouts who took a dislike to the brand’s smartphone monopoly, but for the most part, if you wanted a phone that worked, you took a trip to Steve Jobs land.

It seems, however, that the tide is now changing and according to Karl Volkman, Chief Technical Officer at the SRV Network, it was really only a matter of time.

As of 2012, 46 percent of the US population owns a smart phone and about 75 percent of those have Google’s Android software, up from 44 percent two years ago.

So, why the sudden change of heart?

One of the reasons is purely logistical. Apple produces both the hardware and software for their phones, which means, in theory, they have more control over the quality of the device, says Volkman. There is a belief in the public that maintaining that level of control will ensure a better product, so some are willing to pay the extra money, says Volkman. However, now that a few years have passed since the birth of the iPhone, the Android phones are catching up with the quality of Apple, particularly by offering phones like the Samsung Galaxy.

The second reason the Android market is exploding is a direct result of the first. Because Android phones are now offering if not equal, at least competitive hardware/software combinations, the *real* strength behind the Android is starting to take center stage: options. The downside to the Apple phone is that there aren’t really that many options. Sure, you can choose between black and white, three different storage sizes, ATT or Verizon, and a few different generations, but they’re aren’t really that many variations. The strength of the Android is that the operating system can run across multiple hardware devices. With the option of different hardware companies, comes variations in price, phones, carriers, and basically anything else. Oddly, the greatest weakness of the Android—that it couldn’t offer hardware and software by the same company—also became its greatest strength.

“From an individual standpoint, people aren’t super wowed by what Apple is coming out with,” says Volkman. “Money is a big driver for this environment, so if people can shop around and save a couple hundred dollars, then maybe live with Android because at this point they’re not sacrificing much in terms of features.”

The increasing popularity of Android also meant that app designers were creating versions for both operating systems, eliminating the issue of the Apple App store as the sole place for the best apps.

Finally, one of the main reasons is that simply people *like* Google. It really came down to personal preference for operating systems once Android caught up to Apple with regards to product and apps. People trust the Google brand and they like the idea of the third party vendor, says Volkman. They’re used to using Google to search the web and so they’re comfortable with choosing that over Apple.

[At this point, Microsoft should also be mentioned as a potential future player with the release of Windows 8 and their own smartphone. They’ve taken the gamble of running the same software across all of their hardware instead of having separate operating systems for phone and computer. They’ll have to see how that plays out in the next few years, but for now they’re not a huge market.]

“It’s not perfect. There is no perfect operating system,” says Volkman. “It has benefits and attractions and people feel just as comfortable with an Android as they do using an Apple product.”

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