

Android-Based Mobile Device May Be Coming From Dell

Barry Levine

Dell engineers are developing a pocket-sized, Internet-connected device that will use the Google-backed Android mobile operating system, according to The Wall Street Journal.

The newspaper, citing "people familiar with the company's plans," said two people who have seen prototypes described the new product as similar to the iPhone but without cell-phone functionalities. Dell is expected to release the device later this year, the paper reported, although there is also a possibility the product might not be released.

'Entirely, Absolutely' Plausible

The report also speculated that Dell might sell this mobile Internet device through carriers, such as Verizon Wireless or AT&T, which would dovetail with reports that the company is also developing Android-based smartphones.

Dell hasn't commented on the report, which also indicated the device is likely to use the ARM processors found in a variety of mobile devices -- but not in any products currently offered by Dell.

Avi Greengart, an analyst with industry research firm Current Analysis, said it is "entirely, absolutely" plausible that Dell would be working on such a device. He noted that the company has said it would offer products from "two inches to 20," with the first size approximately matching the new device.

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"There's no question they intend to play in this space," Greengart said. "The only question is how and when." He noted that Dell's steps toward developing a viable line of mobile devices "so far have not been competitive," such as its efforts in MP3 players. There have also been earlier reports, Greengart said, that Dell had developed -- and then not released -- a line of Windows Mobile smartphones.

Growing Momentum for Android

The Journal mentioned that, at one point, Dell had stopped work on its development of a music player to compete with Apple's iPods, and then reassigned those engineers to work on this new device. The company's commitment to this market area was reinforced by its appointment earlier this year of Ain McKendrick as head of mobile Internet devices.

If Dell does use Android in a line of mobile devices, the growing momentum for that open-source operating system could be advanced significantly. Android was originally released with the specified target of smartphones. Three Android smartphones are now on the market, two from HTC and one from Samsung. One of the HTC models, released through T-Mobile as the G1, has sold more than one million units, and a variety of manufacturers have indicated plans to release Android smartphones this year or next.

Additionally, Android is making its way into the growing category of small computers known as netbooks. Earlier this month, laptop makers Acer and ASUSTeK Computer announced they will release netbooks using Android.

Qualcomm has said it is launching a chipset for a new category of Android-based computers called smartbooks.

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