

Microsoft Gives Windows Mobile a new Look for fall

(AP) -- Microsoft Corp. is giving its operating system for "smart phones" a new look in time for the holiday shopping season.

The world's largest software maker said Tuesday that phones running the next version of Windows Mobile will hit store shelves worldwide on Oct. 6. Windows Mobile 6.5, as the new system is called, has an updated look that brings Microsoft's offering more in line with competitors such as Research in Motion Ltd.'s BlackBerry and Apple Inc.'s iPhone.

Windows Mobile 6.5 includes a new version of its Internet Explorer browser for phones, and changes that make it easier to use on touch-screen devices. Microsoft also has developed a free service called My Phone that lets people synchronize text messages, contacts, photos and other phone data on the Internet, where it can be edited or transferred to a new phone.

Microsoft is also launching a mobile application store akin to Apple's store for iPhone apps on iTunes. The company would not say how many developers have submitted applications for the Windows Marketplace for Mobile so far.

AT&T Inc., Sprint Nextel Corp. and Verizon Wireless will all market new Windows Mobile phones, Microsoft said. AT&T will give people who use Windows Mobile 6.5 phones with certain data plans access to its network of Wi-Fi hot spots without additional charge, a perk already enjoyed

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by iPhone and BlackBerry owners.

Microsoft is betting the updated smart phone system will lure more consumers while still appealing to the corporate technology gurus who like the way it works with company e-mail servers.

AT&T's senior vice president for devices, Jeff Bradley, said in an interview that the new system is a good step for Microsoft, but certainly not its last.

"I don't think it catches them up to what is setting the bar today," Bradley said. "I think they've got a definite plan to introduce an even more consumer-friendly and competitive interface and set of services."

Microsoft would not comment on plans for the next version of the mobile operating system.

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