

Nokia and Intel say MeeGo software off to good start

(Reuters) - Nokia (NOK1V.HE) and chip maker Intel (INTC.O) said on Tuesday their joint software venture, seen as crucial for Nokia to improve its position at the top end of the handset market, had got off to a solid start.

"Take-up is really positive," Mika Setala, director of industry alliances at Nokia, told journalists.

In February, the two firms unveiled a plan to create MeeGo, merging Nokia's Linux Maemo software platform with Intel's Moblin, which is also based on Linux open-source software.

"The MeeGo community is active, vibrant," said Martin Curley, head of Intel Labs Europe.

Nokia hopes MeeGo will help it in the battle against Apple's (AAPL.O) iPhone and Google's (GOOG.O) Android at the top end of the cellphone market.

Nokia still controls 40 percent of the smartphone market volumes -- using its Symbian software -- but has lost its leading position among the most expensive models to the new rivals.

In the middle of last year Apple surpassed it as the handset maker generating the largest total profit, despite selling only one iPhone for every 13 phones Nokia sells.

Nokia's Symbian operating system has yet to attract a mass uptake by software developers -- crucial for selling high-end cellphones, after Apple and Google started to change the way consumers use smartphones.

Failure to roll-out successful high-end cellphones, which have fatter margins, has hit Nokia's profits and share price over the last few years.

Last year, when Nokia and Intel unveiled their cooperation agreement, they also mentioned plans to create joint hardware.

"We are still exploring possibilities for joint hardware, but there is nothing to announce," said Nokia's Setala.

BRINGING 3D TO CELLPHONES

Nokia and Intel on Tuesday opened a new research center in Oulu, northern Finland, to look at improving the usability of mobile devices.

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The site -- focusing on 3D user interface technologies -- is part of wider cooperation between the world's largest semiconductor firm and the top cellphone maker.

"The third dimension in mobile user interfaces is largely uncharted waters that could pave the way to immersive experiences where the real and the virtual can be joined and separated with a few clicks," said Christian Lindholm, managing partner at design agency Fjord.

"Augmented reality powered by rich 3D user interfaces can transform the phone as we know it into a remote control of your Internet. The combined research efforts of Nokia and Intel can help make this a reality faster," Lindholm said.

Researchers said 3D services on cellphones would not require the usage of separate glasses like in 3D movies.

"As I look at the success of 3D movies I believe there will be strong development of 3D displays as well," Heikko Huomo, director of the new site, told journalists.

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