

Research in Motion executive confident in PlayBook

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DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Research in Motion Ltd. is "absolutely confident" in its PlayBook tablet despite disappointing sales and aims to appeal to customers already hooked on its BlackBerry smartphones, a company executive said Monday.

Patrick Spence, RIM's managing director for global sales and regional marketing, told The Associated Press in Dubai that the Waterloo, Ontario-based company was not as clear as it could have been in defining the target audience for the devices.

RIM's focus now, he said, is on trying to convince to existing BlackBerry users to consider the PlayBook. It plans to announce new features and functions for the computers soon.

"We still could've done a better job of appealing directly to those BlackBerry customers," he said, adding the company is now and "trying to approach more of them."

The company's focus, he said, is on "targeting the 70 million BlackBerry subscribers around the world, and saying: 'this is the tablet for you.'"

RIM's earnings fell by nearly half in the last fiscal quarter as it sold just 200,000 PlayBooks — far fewer than it and analysts had been expecting. The lackluster sales have weighed on RIM's slumping share price, which has lost about two-thirds of its value since February.

The company faces stiff competition from Apple Inc.'s iPad, by far the biggest-selling tablet computer. Apple sold almost 29 million iPads from April 2010 through June of this year.

Amazon.com Inc. is also getting into the tablet business. It recently unveiled the Kindle Fire, a tablet computer that is listed at \$199, making it cheaper than either the PlayBook or the iPad.

Separately, Spence said RIM is committed to rolling out higher-end phones using its new QNX software sometime in 2012. He declined to specify how soon they would be on store shelves.

"Getting it right trumps saying it's going to be 'X' date. ... I want to make sure we get it right," he said.

Spence was in Dubai along with RIM co-CEO Jim Balsillie to attend the city-state's

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annual GITEX electronics show.

Balsillie used his appearance at the show Monday to showcase the company's commitment to the Mideast and unveil a new service for the BlackBerry OS 7 operating system known as BlackBerry Tag. It is designed to allow users of some of its latest BlackBerry phones to share documents, web links and other information with others by tapping their smartphones together.

Balsillie didn't take questions from the audience and dodged reporters' queries after his speech.

The Mideast is an important market for RIM. BlackBerrys are the top selling smartphones in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the two biggest Arab economies.

Spence said he believes that regulatory concerns which threatened to shut down BlackBerry services in both countries last year are now behind the company.

RIM was able to resolve government watchdogs' concerns through "education and engagement," and not through concessions like installing BlackBerry servers in the countries, he said.

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