Smartphone 4Q sales rise 36 pct led by Samsung

MICHAEL LIEDTKE - AP Technology Writer - Associated Press

Smartphone shipments rose 36 percent worldwide in the fourth quarter as the sleek devices supplanted personal computers and other gadgets on holiday shopping lists, according to a report released Friday.

The findings from the research firm International Data Corp. are the latest sign of the technology upheaval being wrought by the growing popularity of smartphones that can perform a wide variety of tasks, including surfing the Web and taking high-quality photos.

Companies whose fortunes are tied to the PC industry have been particularly hard hit by the shift to smartphones and tablet computers.

While some smartphone models were in short supply during the holiday season, fourth-quarter PC shipments fell by 6 percent from the previous year, according to another IDC report released earlier this month.

IDC estimates 219 million smartphones were shipped during the final three months of last year. That compares with nearly 161 million in the same 2011 period. Smartphones accounted for about 45 percent of all mobile phone shipments in the fourth quarter, the highest percentage recorded by IDC.

Samsung Electronics Co. retained its bragging rights as the smartphone leader, shipping nearly 64 million devices for a 29 percent share of the global market.

Apple Inc. ranked second with nearly 48 million iPhones shipped during the fourth quarter, translating into a market share of 22 percent.

For all of 2012, IDC estimated nearly 713 million smartphones were shipped worldwide, a 44 percent increase from the previous year. Meanwhile, annual PC shipments fell 3 percent from 2011, IDC said. It was the first annual decline since 2001.

Entering 2012, Apple held a slight edge over Samsung in the smartphone market. But Samsung sprinted past Apple during the year as it introduced an array of models, most of which run on Google Inc.'s free Android software. Samsung's top-selling line, the Galaxy, boasts larger display screens than the iPhone and other features.

Apple alleges Samsung's devices illegally ripped off the iPhone's innovations. After a high-profile trial in federal court, a jury in San Jose, Calif. sided with some of the patent infringement claims last August and decided Samsung should pay more than $1 billion in damages. Samsung has been trying to overturn the verdict.

Lower-priced smartphones from Samsung and other device makers also have hurt Apple, whose slowing iPhone growth has contributed to a $250 billion decline in its market value since its stock price peaked in late September.

IDC says Huawei Technologies Ltd.'s emphasis on less expensive handsets helped it become the third largest smartphone maker with a market share of 5 percent at the end of the fourth quarter.

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