

Why Playbook Won't Solve RIM's Problems

Denis Margolin, DataArt | May 18, 2011, 5:35 PM

The tablet market is exploding, with some market research firms predicting tablets to match, or even exceed, traditional PC sales by 2016.

The situation in this emerging tablet market doesn't give the players much room for hesitation, with Apple already having a solid head-start leading the market by millions of units sold and the gap is increasing by the day.

It is obvious from the aggressive pricing that Apple is trying to dominate this market fully as they once did with iPod. What are competitors doing to win market share and get their piece of the tablet pie? Release product as soon as possible – even if incomplete – just to establish their footing in this fast-growth market.

That's what we've seen in the beginning of 2011 – a number of releases of half-baked but ambitious products. Vendors have opted to release so-so products

accompanied with a disclaimer of how future product releases will work out current shortcomings to eventually trump other offerings available to consumers – just trust us.

The launch of the BlackBerry Playbook from RIM is a good example of this premature, product strategy. Playbook was kicked out of the door with number of important features missing. Most notable, Personal Information Management (PIM) functionality is not accessible unless you pair the device with the BlackBerry handset you already own. And even in this case you have to use your handset's cellular data connection to work with your e-mail and contact lists.

PIM is undeniably one of the most important features of the tablet device, making Playbook, in its current state, totally unappealing to non-BlackBerry users. RIM however, promises fixes are just around the corner. But what consumer is willing to purchase a product on future promises? And now, this rush to market approach has resulted in a product recall of 1,000 Playbooks due to a bug in the operating system. Most likely a pre-production version of the software made its way to market allowing no time for quality assurance measures to be taken and no chance to double-check what version was used for production.

It's unclear why RIM is focusing on the tablet in the first place when its primary concern should be addressing an obsolete handset operating system (OS). While its business was built on providing premium corporate e-mail service, today this value proposition is hardly unique. Across the feature/functionality check-list, RIM handsets are losing the battle to iOS, Android and even WP7. Plus BlackBerry users incur additional infrastructure costs for the BlackBerry Enterprise Server (BES).

Unfortunately, as it stands now, the launch of Playbook isn't helping RIM solve its problems and become a more appealing option to consumers. With quickly shrinking market share and failure to attract a new segment of consumers shifting from its established audience of business users to a younger crowd looking for free texting and social media functionality, RIM is hard pressed to restore its market position and Playbook won't help. Unless the BlackBerry ecosystem reinvents itself, Playbook will be a niche product with a very limited market success.

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Image: AP

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