Struggling RIM Announces New Execs

Rob Gillies, Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — BlackBerry maker Research in Motion Ltd. said Tuesday that it has hired two new senior executives, including a marketing chief, as the company looks to regain market share lost to Apple's iPhone.

RIM said Frank Boulben will be the new chief marketing officer, a job RIM's new CEO Thorsten Heins described as critically important for the struggling company.

Boulben, 45, served as executive vice president of strategy and marketing at LightSquared, a wireless company that has been struggling since U.S. regulators moved to kill its proposed nationwide broadband network. Boulben also held senior positions at wireless carriers Vodafone Group and Orange.

Kristian Tear is the new chief operating officer. Tear, 48, was executive vice president of Sony Mobile Communications, a unit of another struggling technology company, Sony Corp.

Heins said both possess a keen understanding of the rapidly changing wireless market and will help sharpen RIM's focus.

The once iconic BlackBerry company is facing its most difficult period in its history. RIM is working on launching a new operating system just as Americans are abandoning their BlackBerrys for iPhones and models that run Google's Android software. Analysts believe RIM's futures depends on the new BlackBerry 10 operating platform due out later this year, although many say it may come too late.

RIM has been without a chief marketing officer since last year and without a chief operating officer since Heins was promoted in January. Heins replaced co-CEO's Jim Balsillie and Mike Lazaridis after the company lost tens of billions in market value.

Heins has said that RIM has to improve its marketing. Boulben will be in charge of that.

"RIM is a pioneer in the mobile world and the BlackBerry brand is a global icon," Boulben said in a statement. "We all know how fast the mobile arena evolves and with the BlackBerry 10 platform, I believe RIM will once again change the way individuals and enterprises engage with each other."

The Waterloo, Ontario-based company has long dominated the corporate smartphone market. Its BlackBerry's are known for their security and reliability. President Obama even refused to part with his BlackBerry after he took office.

But while RIM still has 77 million subscribers and continues to enjoy success in emerging markets, it has had limited success in the U.S. consumer market in recent

years, particularly with high-end devices that sport touch screens popular with consumers. Touch-screen BlackBerrys that lack physical keyboards have largely flopped. BlackBerrys also lag iPhones and Android phones when it comes to running third-party applications.

RIM is also dealing with a "bring your own device" trend, in which employees bring their personal iPhones or Android devices to work instead of relying on BlackBerrys issued by their employers.

Colin Gillis, an analyst with BGC Financial, said Boulben's task will be to find a way for RIM to simplify its message without ignoring the consumer market.

"Quite frankly the marketing bar is so low that a basic competent professional should be able to improve their messaging," Gillis said.

RIM's stock fell 3 cents to $11.79 in midday trading Tuesday.

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