RIM Begins Showing New BlackBerrys To Carriers

Rob Gillies, Associated Press

KITCHENER, Ontario (AP) — Canadian phone maker Research In Motion has begun showing its new BlackBerry smartphones to wireless carriers around the world, but the struggling company says it is still months away from starting to sell them.

The smartphones running the new BlackBerry 10 operating system are critical to RIM's survival. RIM executives met with wireless companies this week and provided a glimpse of the much-delayed system.

It is due out early next year and comes as North Americans are abandoning BlackBerrys for flashier iPhones and Android phones.

Andrew McLeod, managing director of RIM's Canadian operations, said Thursday that feedback from wireless carriers has been positive. McLeod said the company will begin to discuss the product launches and other business aspects with the carriers soon.

"We're in the process of finalizing the software," McLeod said. "It was at a point where we had a confidence level that we could really demonstrate the validity of the products and software. Obviously you don't want to show something that is not going to wow folks. People were excited with what they saw."

Alec Saunders, vice president of developer relations for RIM, said RIM is still "months and months" away from shipping the devices. RIM hosted hundreds of app developers at a conference near the company's headquarters in Waterloo, Ontario on Thursday. Saunders has been trying to rally software developers to build for the new BlackBerry platform. RIM has lagged Apple in app development

The new BlackBerrys will be released months after Apple is expected to launch the iPhone 5. Analysts believe the launch will be Apple's biggest product introduction yet.

RIM's platform transition is also happening under a new management team and as RIM lays off 5,000 employees as part of a bid to save $1 billion.

Thorsten Heins, who took over as RIM's chief executive in January after the company lost tens of billions in market value, had vowed to do everything he could to release BlackBerry 10 this year but he said in June that the timetable simply wasn't realistic.

RIM was once Canada's most valuable company with a market value of more than $80 billion in June 2008, but the stock has plummeted since, from over $140 share to around $7. Its decline is evoking memories of Nortel, another Canadian tech giant, which declared bankruptcy in 2009.

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