

Where can Android improve?



SHAHNOOR RABBAN

It is no secret that Android is and will continue to be the number one smartphone platform. So much so, that the word smartphone is synonymous with it running on Android. There was initially a time when Android was still in its primary stages in 2008 and it took two years and a Samsung Galaxy S to bring it into prominence. But in Samsung, Google had and still has a very viable OEM that has worked tirelessly at mass producing a plethora of Android devices at every price point, covering all demographics. Not to mention it has been one of the biggest spenders in R&D and has implemented all of its in-house components to its Android devices. Take the Exynos chipsets and the SuperAMOLED screens for instance.

So the question is where does Google go from here on in? The Mountain View based company almost never puts a step wrong

when it comes to investments, and following that trend, they invested in Android, with the understanding that the smartphone market would be the among the fastest growing ones; and it still is. However it can be argued that Google missed a beat with explosion of the tablet (iPad) market. The popularity and growth of the iPad might have come as a shock to everyone but the people at Cupertino. Even though Honeycomb was a good tablet OS, it was not as fluid or as simple as iOS on tablets. And perhaps widgets didn't/don't make as much sense on a tablet. Most importantly, Android was quite barren in tablet specific apps when Honeycomb was released. So, it took a few years, \$200 tablets, the Asus Transformer line of devices and Kindle Fire for Android tablets to gain some momentum. But much work is still left to be done.

The reason the iPad succeeded was because it had advertised itself as a device meant to watch movies,

browse and play games on. Not as a device with content creation and productivity at its base. However, Android has always said that productivity was a key area in tablets and along with its shortcomings with the tablet OS, it never really properly competed with Apple. The Transformer line of devices from Asus, while initially a breath of fresh air with the detachable keyboard, never really proved as fruitful, mainly because of its OS limitations. They tried to find the right balance between content consumption and creation but fell short of the mark in both parts.

The idea that tablets and smartphones would eventually eat into the desktop PC and laptop market was always there and it is exactly what is happening. Perhaps, netbooks are soon to see its date of extinction as a result of this phenomenon. But desktop PC's and laptops, especially with the emergence of ultrabooks are here to stay. Google needs to try to take

Android to the PC and desktop market and also improve on hybrid touchscreen laptops. Microsoft's latest iteration of Windows shows that it had touchscreen devices and ARM processors (which mostly run these devices) in mind – so much so, that using Windows 8 on a desktop can initially feel intrusive and somewhat counterproductive. Google has already made handheld smartphone usage as easy as can be and has recently made further advancements with its API to make app developing better and easier.

Google will try to provide products to developing markets at highly competitive prices as has been seen with the Nexus range of devices last year. Perhaps the next iteration of Android – Key Lime Pie – will work on these areas. With increased competition from Microsoft's latest version of Windows, this can only lead to better products from Google and in the end making the consumer the biggest benefactor.

First solar-powered chopper invented under supervision of Bangladeshi

IT & TELECOM DESK

A group of masters students from the Queen Mary, University of London invented solar-powered remote-controlled helicopter dubbed 'Solarcopter' under the supervision of Bangladeshi scientist Dr M Hasan Shaheed. It is said to be the world of its kind.

Dr Shaheed is working in the university as lecturer, Robotics, Control and Computing, Department of Engineering.

Although there are fixed wing solar aircraft projects like Swiss Solar Impulse or NASA's Sun Seeker, Pathfinder or Helios, there was no helicopter that could fly with energy from sunlight only.

Solarcopter, is the first to fly only with solar-energy generated from a custom designed PV panel. It is a four-propeller quad rotor and capable of short flights at this moment but with further research it will soon be able fly for longer period,"

finally ready for a test.

As most of the time there is not enough sunlight to test the flying ability of solar-powered system like this in UK. A solar simulator using halogen lamps was therefore constructed in the Lab.

When the Solarcopter, placed under the sun simulator, was activated through remote controller, the propellers started rotating and in few seconds, the Solarcopter took off from its base and remained in flight for a considerable time - the first solar powered helicopter in the world came into existence.

The Solarcopter was awarded best project prize 2013 sponsored by National Physics Laboratory (NPL).

The project has been receiving enormous appreciation from the very beginning from young enthusiasts across the globe through its facebook page.

Its footage is also available on Youtube.

Articles on Solarcopter have been published in technology magazines and



Dr Hasan Shaheed observes the group's work on Solarcopter.

PHOTO: COURTESY

said Dr Shaheed.

This particular project started two years ago with an Iraqi origin student Aly Abidali and a solar helicopter prototype was successfully built. It carried a solar panel to charge an on board battery that provided the power for flight, rather than flying on purely solar power. The ultimate challenge, to make the Solarcopter fly solely from solar energy without the need of the battery, then began.

The project was carried forward to masters' level with a group of 6 more students including Bangladeshi origin Shakir Ahmed and a co-supervisor Prof Antonio Munjiza.

Finding the optimum weight to power ratio was the key challenge to produce such a helicopter.

Extensive tests were carried out to select materials, propulsion system and to optimise solar panel. After five months of hard work, the prototype was

blogs including Gizmag, Fast Company and Design Boom. The project was also featured in the international science and technology show, 'The Daily Planet' of the Discovery Channel.

Dr Shaheed now aims to carry this research forward to application levels. A proposal outlining further research direction has already been offered to the next batch of masters students.

The next challenge is to make the Solarcopter fly with payloads like camera and GPS. This will enable the system to be used for surveillance, law enforcement, search and rescue, traffic management, information gathering for weather forecast, tracking movement of animals.

Due to its low cost, many potential users are expected to be interested in the system. The device will also form the basis to build big solar helicopter to be used as passengers' career and cargo.

Apple looking at bigger iPhone screens, multiple colours



REUTERS

Apple Inc is exploring launching iPhones with bigger screens, as well as cheaper models in a range of colours, over the next year, said four people with knowledge of the matter, as it takes a cue from rival Samsung Electronics.

The moves, which are still under discussion, underscore how the California-based firm that once ruled the smartphone market is increasingly under threat from its aggressive South Korean competitor. Samsung has overtaken Apple in market share through the popularity of its bigger-screen Galaxy "phablets" and by flooding the market with a range of products at different prices.

Apple is looking at introducing at least two bigger iPhones next year - one with a 4.7-inch screen and one with a 5.7-inch screen - said the

sources, including those in the supply chain in Asia. They said suppliers have been approached with plans for the larger screens, but noted it is still unclear whether Apple will actually launch its flagship product in the larger sizes.

"They constantly change product specifications almost to the final moment, so you're not really sure whether this is the final prototype," said one person with direct knowledge of the matter.

Apple declined to comment.

Apple's possible shift to offer what is often referred to as "phablets" - chunkier smartphones not quite big enough to qualify as tablets - comes as the long-time consumer and investor darling faces pressure to deliver more than one new handset model a year. Critics say its pace of innovation has slowed since the death of legendary co-founder Steve Jobs.

The iPhone 5 launched last

September was the first to veer away from the Apple phone's 3.5-inch screen, which Jobs famously deemed "the perfect size for consumers" and had been used in every iPhone since the iconic device was unveiled in 2007.

The current iPhone 5 has one of the smaller screens among the best-selling smartphones in the mobile market, where consumers spend more time browsing the web and streaming content. Samsung's Galaxy S4 and Galaxy Note 2 have 5-inch and 5.5-inch screens, respectively.

For this year, Apple is expected to launch two new models, widely referred to as the iPhone 5S, with new fingerprint technology, and a cheaper version in plastic casing, supply chain sources have said. Apple plans to dress up the cheaper phone in a range of 5-6 colours to differentiate it from the more expensive model that has traditionally come only in black and white.

The US firm has discussed a price of \$99 for the cheaper phone, the timing of which could slip to next year, one of the people said. It's not yet clear what the final price would be.

Apple - whose revenue growth has decelerated from the heady days of 2010 when it introduced the iPad and when the iPhone was the world's top selling smartphone - has sought ways to re-energize its flagship line.

Analysts say the company needs a cheaper gadget to push on in growth markets in China and India, and to counter Samsung's edge in having phones priced up and down the spectrum.



A picture taken on June 12 at the hall of Letnany fairground in Prague shows a dummy sitting on the flying bike, a unique construction of Czech designers and modern technology of French company "Dessault Systemes - 3D software tools". This bike flies thanks to six futuristic horizontal propellers and an electric motor.

PHOTO : AFP

Facebook adds 'hashtag' feature

REUTERS, San Francisco

Facebook Inc, the world's No. 1 social network, is adopting the "hashtag," one of the most recognizable features of its younger rival Twitter, in a move to position its Web service as an important complement to television, sporting events and breaking news.

Facebook said on Wednesday that it will begin to roll out the feature on its social network, making it easier for users and advertisers to find hot spots of user activity around specific events or topics.

The hashtag, which appears as the # symbol and was first popularized on Twitter, enables users to follow specific topics of conversation within a social network's ever-changing stream of user comments.

Facebook users will now be able to group comments on the same topic by typing the hashtag alongside a keyword - such as #election - at the end of a post.

The hashtag has proven to be a handy system for social networking users to join online conversations as events unfold in real-time, such as political debates, television shows and sports. And it provides an easy way for advertisers to reach a particular audience.

