

## Microsoft chief lays down gauntlet on mobiles

*Paul Taylor and Richard Waters*

*Steve Ballmer, Microsoft chief executive, insists that the company is not playing catch-up as it focuses on both low and high-cost smartphones after launching a new version of its Windows Mobile phone operating system.*

"I think that if you look at the market today, volumes speak volumes. In the last year we shipped over 20m phones," he told the Financial Times, "I'd say, mostly, it's game on – we are all out there. We are leading the pack on volume. I'd say Apple's got some advantages on image, but we're in the early stages."

Explaining the strategy to expand the appeal of "Windows Phones" and extend its push into the mobile market, Mr Ballmer told the annual Mobile World Congress industry trade show in Barcelona on Monday: "We need to take our Windows Mobile business to another level."

While Mr Ballmer did not mention rivals by name, the latest announcements appear designed to ensure that mobile phones powered by Windows Mobile are able to compete more effectively against competitors, including Apple's iPhone and the new handsets powered by Google's Android operating system.

"It is no longer just about how a phone works by itself," he said, "it is about how it works in conjunction with a PC and the internet. The time has come for us to take the full Windows experience to mobile phones."

Mr Ballmer said the next version of Microsoft's Windows Mobile operating system – Windows Mobile 6.5, which will be launched in the second half of this year – has been designed with this in mind.

Microsoft executives emphasised that these handsets will be designed to appeal to consumers as well as business users who, to date, have been the main buyers of Windows-powered smartphones. Microsoft also wants to see its operating system built into more mobile devices.

Among its features, the new operating system is designed to make more use of touch screens and enable users to operate their handsets with one thumb.

Microsoft also announced the launch of a new free web-based service, dubbed My Phone, designed "to bridge the gap between PC and mobile phone".

As expected, Mr Ballmer also announced the launch later this year of a Windows Mobile application "marketplace".

Nokia, the world's largest mobile phone maker, also announced the launch of an online application store on Monday to be called the Ovi Store.

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