

To start, push the Windows logo button

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When Microsoft decided to revive its ailing cellphone software business, it turned to the marketer who came up with the Staples "Easy Button," which speaks the tagline "That was easy" when pushed.

Starting Tuesday, Microsoft is introducing a new version of its cellphone operating system, Windows Mobile 6.5, with a barrage of television ads. The star, again, is a button. Not a big red one, but a tiny one on a cellphone, sporting the Windows flag logo.

Todd Peters, the onetime Staples executive hired by Microsoft to be corporate vice president for mobile communication marketing, said one problem he discovered when he joined the company a year and a half ago was that consumers did not even know that Microsoft made phone software. And they could not tell which phones had Microsoft inside by looking at them in a store.

So the new fall crop of phones that will use the software — 30 different models from manufacturers including Samsung, HTC and LG — will all have a button with the Windows logo that will bring up the software's start menu. The company is no longer going to advertise the name Windows Mobile, even though that is still the operating system's name.

"We're trying to simplify and have people say 'It's a Windows phone,' " just as they refer to a Windows PC, Mr. Peters said.

Mr. Peters said the company considered creating a new brand for its phone software, the way it replaced Windows Live Search with Bing. But ultimately, he said, it decided that the Windows brand offered the promise of a lifeline for people confused by the vast array of smartphones on the market.

"The key point is that the stuff you know and love on a PC you can now find on a Windows phone," he said. The company's strategy will be to position Windows as the best way for people to manage their electronic lives on their computers, on the phone, on the television set and on Microsoft's Web sites.

Microsoft certainly needs to find something to revive interest in Windows Mobile. The operating system had a 9.3 percent share of the worldwide smartphone market in the second quarter, according to Gartner Group, down from 12 percent a year ago.

The global leader is Nokia's Symbian operating system, which is on 57 percent of smartphones, although not many are sold in the United States. Research In Motion's operating system, used on its BlackBerry, is now second with 18.7 percent of phones sold, followed by Apple's iPhone operating system, which had a 13.3 percent share in the quarter, surging past Microsoft.

This year, Microsoft is also facing competition from handsets that use Google's Android operating system. A number of companies that have made Windows Mobile phones, including Samsung and HTC, are now making Android handsets, too. Motorola has dropped Windows Mobile entirely in favor of Android, which is free to the handset maker and has a more iPhone-like interface.

For years, Microsoft has positioned Windows Mobile as an alternative to the BlackBerry, with features designed to appeal to corporations that use Microsoft e-mail and Microsoft Office software. The interface was designed for users tapping the screen with a stylus.

Now, two years after Apple introduced the iPhone, Microsoft wants its phones to be fun to use and finger-friendly as well. The new software features large icons rather than tiny menus. There is a new free service, called MyPhone, that will help users make backup copies of their photos and contacts. While Microsoft has long allowed others to write programs to run on Windows Mobile phones, it is introducing a new Marketplace, modeled after Apple's App Store, to make it easier to find new things to do with the phones.

So far, analysts who have seen the new software say they are unimpressed.

"There is nothing in this version that makes drastic changes that will get people to choose Windows who didn't before," said Carolina Milanesi, an analyst for the Gartner Group.

Microsoft has told analysts that version 7 of Windows Mobile will be a much bigger change, but it has not said when that software will be available.

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