

'Symbian Signed' Likely Won't Equate to Application Quality

Nick Jones, Ben Wood

The Symbian Signed initiative is unlikely to provide a meaningful guarantee of application quality, and could actually inconvenience some developers.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 18 May 2004, Symbian announced the formal launch of the Symbian Signed initiative for digitally signing and certifying Symbian applications that meet a set of test criteria. The initiative's goal is to establish a link between applications and their developers, and to set baseline quality standards for third-party applications to be distributed via mobile networks and application publishers. Signed applications will benefit from preferential marketing by Symbian and its partners.

Analysis

Gartner believes that Symbian Signed, in its current form, is a weak certification program oriented largely toward the needs of application publishers and network operators. It has many flaws, with the three most serious being:

- The test criteria are minimal and oriented toward application installation, interaction with network features such as billing, and ensuring that the application does not disrupt major phone features such as call handling. No meaningful tests exist to ensure usability, quality, effective documentation, conformance with interface expectations, correct operation in the absence of expected network features or correct operation on all hardware variants of the complex and fragmented Symbian platform.
- Not all certification is carried out independently. Applications can be self-certified by application publishers or approved developers. There is no guarantee that such organizations will be unbiased and impartial.
- The Symbian Signed program will absorb some earlier certification schemes run by operators and handset vendors. This may present some risks. If a single industrywide Symbian certification scheme is adopted by most of the vendor community, operators might eventually try to establish greater control over which applications are installed on their handsets by supplying only locked handsets that require application signatures. This might place enterprises and independent developers at a disadvantage.

Overall, Gartner views the Symbian Signed initiative as a missed opportunity that will do little to drive the Symbian application market or enhance user trust in Symbian applications. There is even a risk that low-quality certified applications could damage the Symbian brand.

Recommendation: Do not assume that Symbian Signed certification guarantees any meaningful level of application quality or performance. If this program is to be more than a vendor rubber stamp, it will require more rigorous quality standards and more independent certification.

Analytical Sources: Nick Jones and Ben Wood, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Symbian Must Retain Its Impartiality as Nokia's Stake Grows" — Nokia is set to gain more influence over Symbian by buying Psion's 31 percent stake. But Symbian's future depends on safeguarding its reputation for independence. **By Ben Wood, Nick Jones and Ken Dulaney**

- "Allow for Mobile Application Development's Growing Pains" — Tools for developing mobile applications are maturing, but should still be considered tactical purchases, to be replaced within 36 months. **By Nick Jones**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access all of this content.)

REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

Corporate Headquarters
56 Top Gallant Road
Stamford, CT 06902-7700
U.S.A.
+1 203 964 0096

European Headquarters
Tamesis
The Glanty
Egham
Surrey, TW20 9AW
UNITED KINGDOM
+44 1784 431611

Asia/Pacific Headquarters
Level 7, 40 Miller Street
North Sydney
New South Wales 2060
AUSTRALIA
+61 2 9459 4600

Latin America Headquarters
Av. das Nações Unidas 12.551
9 andar—WTC
04578-903 São Paulo SP
BRAZIL
+55 11 3443 1509