

Symbian Keeps Consumer Focus With Latest Operating System

Nick Jones, Ben Wood, Ken Dulaney

The latest version of Symbian's operating system will help to address the needs of midmarket consumer devices. But OS/9 offers little for enterprises.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Event

On 2 February 2005, Symbian introduced OS/9, the latest version of its operating system for mobile telephone handsets and personal electronic devices.

Analysis

Symbian's OS/9 includes several useful new features:

- Semiconductor reference designs on Intel chips will reduce licensees' time to market.
- New software development tools, including the open-source Eclipse integrated development environment, will produce faster and more compact code to reduce hardware costs and improve performance. These tools will also provide a more standardized and open environment for developers.
- Improved platform security features will reduce the potential for viruses and provide a better foundation for digital rights management. This will also address the perception of increased risk from mobile viruses.
- More globalization support and new user interface features will support multiple displays.
- Device management is based on Open Mobile Alliance standards.
- E-mail and calendaring features have been improved.
- Improved media and image processing will support better video and higher-resolution cameras.

However, OS/9 also has some drawbacks for enterprises:

- OS/9 includes almost no features for enterprises. Symbian's evolution is driven by handset manufacturers and operators that target the consumer market. This is good for Symbian, because consumers make up the largest market, but not for enterprises.
- Improved security means a wider need for application signing and certification. This might inconvenience third-party or enterprise developers and will increase the importance of the "Symbian Signed" program, which Gartner believes is weak.
- E-mail and calendaring still depend on licensees building a user interface on top of core features, and are not standardized across Symbian devices. This will make Symbian handsets more diverse and implementations more complex.
- The operating system does not include built-in support for push-to-talk or instant messaging systems.

Overall, this useful release will help Symbian address the midtier handset market. But it aims at the needs of mobile operators and handset manufacturers. The Symbian platform remains targeted at consumers and "prosumers" (professionals who purchase devices for themselves), and offers little for the enterprise. Gartner expects the first OS/9-based devices to become available in the second half of 2005.

Recommendations:

- **Operators and handset manufacturers using the Symbian platform:** Adopt OS/9.
- **Enterprises seeking a smartphone platform:** Evaluate alternatives, such as those from Microsoft and Research in Motion (RIM).

Analytical Sources: Nick Jones, Ken Dulaney and Ben Wood, Gartner Research

Recommended Reading and Related Research

- "Market Share: Smartphones, Worldwide, 3Q04" — More than four-fifths of the smartphones shipped to distributors worldwide during this period were Symbian models, mostly from Nokia. **By Ben Wood and Roberta Cozza**
- "'Symbian Signed' Likely Won't Equate to Application Quality" — The Symbian Signed initiative is unlikely to provide a meaningful guarantee of application quality and could actually inconvenience some developers. **By Nick Jones and Ben Wood**

(You may need to sign in or be a Gartner client to access all of the research referenced in this FirstTake)

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