

MOBILE WORLD PRODS TABLETS TO DO MORE

SONY UNVEILS 'WORLD'S SLIMMEST WATERPROOF TABLET'

BARCELONA: Bigger than a telephone yet smaller than a personal computer, tablets were supposed to usher in a new world of mobility; yet they have hardly budged off the couch. Four years after their launch, tablets remain overwhelmingly stuck at home and connected by Wi-Fi, frustrating mobile operators who are deprived of a potential new source of revenue.

At the February 24-27 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, manufac-

technology research house Informa. "During the last iPad launch, Apple showed a promotional video with thousands of different ways that people can use their iPad including mountain bikers, surfers, doctors," Jest said.

"I think that is how they would like to show the iPad is being used, but it is mainly in the home, streaming media, streaming movies." According to Informa, only 20 percent of tablets are connected to the mobile network, the

Lawrence Lundy, analyst at Frost & Sullivan technology consultants. "We see that a lot of the tablets are being used for video consumption because it is mainly at home and it does not have a 3G connection," Lundy said. For mobile operators, that means significantly less revenue than they had hoped for.

"It primarily comes down to costs, I think," said Nick Dillon, analyst at the research group, Ovum. "For the customers, there are two costs involved: the cellular-enabled tablets are more expensive, there is a kind of cost premium in terms of acquisition, and then on top of that, there is obviously the cost of data."

Analysts said the operators have not been sufficiently creative, often proposing plans that are as costly as those for smartphones. "I am not sure if operators see it as a challenge or a blessing," said Carolina Milanese, analyst at consumer research group Kantar Worldpanel. "It seems clear that tablets are mostly used as entertainment devices which would suggest a potential bandwidth drain on video consumption," she said. In other words, if all the tablets were connected, 3G networks would be quickly overloaded.

Tablets may finally break free of the home, however, as sales grow of mini tablets, which are easier to carry around. Manufacturers launched a string of such devices in Barcelona. Chinese manufacturer Huawei showed off its MediaPad X1 and Finnish maker Nokia revealed its XL, for example, both of which will allow users to make telephone calls, too. The latest, super-fast, fourth-generation network will also help, analysts said. "More 4G connectable tablets will probably mean less use of Wi-Fi," said Jean-Laurent Pitou, head of communications, media and technology at research group Accenture. But this would also require network costs to adapt, with cheaper plans for consumers, Pitou cautioned. —AFP



BARCELONA: Visitors look at Xperia tablet Z2 by Sony. —AFP

turers such as Japan's Sony, China's Lenovo and Taiwan's Asus again unveiled a range of new tablet models, now considered essential to their mobile device offerings. Sony Mobile revealed its Xperia Z2, proudly describing it as "the world's slimmest and lightest waterproof tablet".

"It is perfect if you want to take it into the bathtub, to the beach, to the pool," Sony Mobile official Almos Szabo said at the Japanese manufacturer's stand in the world's largest mobile industry fair. The ease with which tablets can be used outside is always stressed by manufacturers, said Julian Jest, analyst at the

rest relying on Wi-Fi. The classic profile of a tablet user, is actually a person lounging on the sofa watching videos or playing electronic games. In 2012, a poll by Google showed that only 21 percent of users took their tablets out of the home.

It comes down to costs

Technology research group Gartner Inc. found in a September 2013 survey that people use their tablets mostly between 7pm and 10pm, probably while watching television. Tablets are not typically used as a mobile accessory carried around by owners, said

GADGET WATCH: FASTLANE IN NOKIA X SHOWS PROMISE

By Anick Jesdanun

BARCELONA: By design, Nokia's new Android smartphones will underwhelm users of high-end phones. The Nokia X line was created with emerging markets in mind, so the company emphasized keeping prices low, meaning the user interface is relatively simple. The home screen resembles the one on Nokia's Windows-based Lumia phones, even though it's Android underneath. But Nokia Corp added a Fastlane feature, a screen with quick access to your most-used apps. You get to it by swiping from the left or right edge of the home screen or tapping the back button at the bottom.

The basic Nokia X phone costs 89 euros (\$122) and has a 4-inch screen, measured diagonally, and a 3 megapixel camera. A X+ version with an SD storage card costs 99 euros, while an XL with a 5-inch screen and 5 megapixel camera goes for 109 euros. In the brief time I've had with the Nokia X at this week's Mobile World Congress wireless show in Barcelona, Spain, I have found the Fastlane feature to be a good start. It's something I would like to see on more phones, including Nokia's Windows devices.

I hate to spend time customizing gadgets, getting the icons for the most-used apps on the main home screen. The nice thing about Fastlane is that you don't have to spend any time on that. Your favorite apps are just one swipe away - sort of. The top of Fastlane shows you what's coming up, whether that's alarms about to ring or future events in your calendar. Below that are your recently used apps. The ones you just used will be at the top, so you don't have to scroll down.

For some apps, you get information that normally comes with notifications, such as previews of text messages or alerts that three people have tried to reach you on WeChat, a Chinese social network. You see small versions of recent photos and can tap for the larger version in the photo gallery app. You see calls you missed, songs you heard and websites you visited.

It could get overwhelming, so you can block certain apps and certain notifications from appearing in Fastlane. In the settings, you can also add a shortcut to one social network, such as Facebook or Twitter. That's where Fastlane can improve - understanding better which apps I use most over a period of days or months and creating a section at the top for those.

This week, for example, I was too busy to check Facebook, but that doesn't mean I don't use it regularly. But in Fastlane, Facebook would drop toward the bottom in a matter of days, unless I happen to choose it as my one shortcut. Why not make sure the most-used apps are stored as favorites at the top of the screen? Nokia says it's considering that. —AP

PARKOUR GOES FROM YOUTUBE FAD TO FITNESS CRAZE

BROOKLINE: The spirited sport known as parkour that treats the world as one big obstacle course is gaining traction outside of the urban enthusiasts whose YouTube-worthy acrobatics spread its popularity. Once the domain of the outdoor anti-athlete, it's becoming the go-to sport for people who just want a good workout.

Jessamyn Hodge, a 32-year-old software and information engineer from South Boston, recently prepped for her first parkour class at a high school gym in suburban Brookline. She was hoping to learn the kind of wall-scaling, fence-vaulting, obstacle-conquering moves she'd already seen in online videos shared by her rock-climbing friends.

"It's like dancing at high speed," she said. "It reminds me of being a kid again, like monkeying around on anything and everything, clambering about, generally having fun while getting around." Parkour, developed in France in the 1980s, borrows elements from martial arts, gymnastics, rock climbing and other athletic fields to enable participants to turn obsta-

cles like park benches, trees, guardrails, and buildings into tools they can use to nimbly propel themselves forward.

Parkour's developers were influenced by military training principles. Since then, some of the sport's most spectacular moves have been featured in movie sequences, video games and advertisements. One of the most recognizable is a chase scene in the 2006 James Bond movie "Casino Royale." Beginners who want to hit the ground running - but maybe not by running up a construction crane, James Bond-style - have the option of classes like those offered by London-Based Parkour Generations, a business with affiliates in California, Pennsylvania, Texas and Wisconsin, and that offers instruction in several countries including Thailand, Singapore and Brazil.

Classes include a warm-up, technical drills to learn the basics of safety and games to teach and reinforce parkour techniques. At the Brookline class, instructors set up metal bars they called scaffolding and vault boxes in the gym, teaching students how to walk on or hurtle over balance

beams and lift, leap or weave their way through whatever else was in their path. Both newcomers and advanced learners trained together, but those with more experience were given more challenging training.

Instructor Blake Evitt said many of the new students he sees view parkour as a functional way to get fit. But parkour offers more than flashy stunts - it's a way for people to test their physical and mental limits. "It's almost a way of life," said Evitt, a director of the US branch of Parkour Generations. Julio Sepulveda, a climate-change researcher, who takes classes in the Boston suburb of Somerville, Mass, said parkour is very accessible because learners don't need access to fancy, expensive gear to get into it. They can simply walk to a nearby park and use the existing environment to practice. "And it's really all about your flow . the flow of your movements and . your mind, which is really cool," Sepulveda said after catching his breath. "So it's a nice connection between your mind and your body." —AP