

Amazon Fire Phone Different but Not in the Right Way

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Amazon's Fire Phone launch hinged on a message not unlike the one Apple has pushed for quite some time. Apple professes to "think different," while Jeff Bezos simply hoped his new product would be "different" than the rest of the pack.

It isn't where it really matters: price.

At its core, the Fire Phone is really just another Android phone, with a couple gimmicks—3D display, gesture control, Firefly—thrown in for good measure. Sure, that 3D feature will turn heads for a bit (literally, you can control things by moving your head), but in the end, it's not going to compensate for the fact that Amazon's phone lives behind a walled garden.

There's a reason that just prior to Wednesday's launch Amazon touted the 240,000 apps in its App Store.

Users of high-end smartphones are not going to buy the Fire Phone for a number of reasons but the limited access to Google Play is one big reason power users will stay away. Gesture control and 3D are not enough to sway the power user from an LG G3, an HTC One M8, or a Galaxy S5, all of which cost the same but offer full access to the Google Play store.

Amazon had a chance to really do something different. I'd originally thought it would stick with the model it has applied to its line of Fire tablets. A \$400 unlocked price point would have given it a place of its own in a segment that right now is basically dominated in the United States by Motorola's Moto E, G and X. Instead Bezos and Company went with a crowd of other established OEMs at \$200 on contract and exclusively through AT&T.

The Fire Phone will certainly have its users but not enough to take meaningful share from Apple, Samsung, LG and HTC. Nokia tried this same strategy and came to market with a line of excellent phones and still it languishes in the basement of the market, largely due to its lack of apps. Sound familiar?

In a previous post, I'd argued that Amazon has all the pieces to make its mark in the smartphone space. And to some extent I still believe that to be true. After playing around with the Fire Phone after the launch event, I was impressed with the execution of the device itself, but if presented with the choice between a Fire Phone and a full-fledged Android phone (or an iPhone), I'd take the latter.

Amazon should be able to capitalize on its mature and established ecosystem and customer base, but it will have to be different in a very different way.

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