

Windows Phone Still Chanting, 'Developers, Developers, Developers!'

Editor

I'm glad we've moved beyond the numbers game when it comes to apps and app stores. It's sufficient to say that all major mobile operating systems now have more apps than any end user will ever discover and put to use.

I'm also happy to report that the discussion has evolved. End users and reports about the various operating systems are now looking at quality of apps, and availability of those premier pieces of software that really affect a consumer's decisions at the time of purchase. For instance, I'd be hard-pressed to purchase a device that didn't have an Rdio app, and Flipboard has kind of become my go-to for information of any kind.



I'm inclined to agree with Jacob Siegal over at BGR who recently opined that switching between Apple and Android has ceased to be that big of deal given that most of the apps he uses are available on both platforms.

That said, I would argue that Microsoft's Windows Phone still has a long way to go before it reaches app parity with either iOS or Android. Windows Phone still lags far behind the big two in breadth of offerings as well as in the quality of some of those apps.

I recently did an accounting of 10 apps that I use on my iPhone and their subsequent availability in the Windows Store. Of the 10 apps that I use most often on my iPhone, only five of them were available for Microsoft's operating system.

For instance, Flipboard isn't available for Windows Phone, but then neither were some of the non-premium apps upon which I depend; my local credit union's app, which allows for mobile deposit, wasn't available on Windows Phone either.

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To its credit, Microsoft has done some of the heavy lifting to ensure availability of certain staples. The company actually went to the trouble of developing its own Facebook app in the absence of one from Zuckerberg and company. Also, while there's no Google Maps, Microsoft's own HERE Maps, a product of the Nokia acquisition, are truly impressive.

And while users switching to Windows Phone from iOS or Android might be able to piece together an experience similar to the one they enjoyed on their previous devices, there will be a kind of poorly cobbled feel to it. If you read some of the reviews of apps for Windows Phone, you'll notice a recurring theme: Many of the apps are missing key functionality provided in their Android and iOS versions. I found this to be the case with Rdio for Windows Phone.

In the first quarter of 2014, Nielsen estimated that Windows Phone claimed about three percent of the smartphone market, with Android claiming 52 percent of the pie and iOS taking home 42 percent. BlackBerry, in its death throes, had just 2 percent and the remaining scraps were left to "Other." It's probably obvious that Windows Phone is failing in any meaningful way to fulfill its promise as the so-called "third ecosystem."

After spending quite a bit of time with a Nokia Lumia 1020, I have to say that it is a lack of committed developer support to Windows Phone that is ultimately keeping this platform from getting off the ground. The Nokia hardware and camera are of the highest quality and the Windows Phone UI is exceptional in its ease of use and aesthetics.

With its deep integration of Microsoft's Office software, Windows Phone really does have a chance to make it in the smartphone game, but it absolutely must get developers, both big and hyper-local, behind it and not in the half-hearted manner they are now. It might be argued that Steve Ballmer realized this better than anyone.

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