Amid Android, iOS Pressure, RIM Makes Its Pitch

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SAN DIEGO—During a Wednesday keynote address, Research In Motion CIO Robin Bienfait spelled out why BlackBerry still deserves a place in the enterprise after falling behind iOS and Android.

A long-time staple for business users, RIM is fighting to maintain its hold on the market as an increasing number of workers have turned to iOS and Android instead of BlackBerry.

Bienfait pitched the new enterprise-friendly features for its forthcoming BlackBerry 10 platform, slated to come out early next year.

Bienfait was joined on stage by BlackBerry marketing executive Jeff Gadway, who demonstrated some of BlackBerry 10's key features.

The platform is designed so that there is complete separation between the personal side of the device and work-related applications and data.

"IT can manage, secure and control sensitive enterprise data without compromising the end-user experience," Gadway said.

Using a prototype device, he demonstrated BlackBerry Balance, which quarantines enterprise data in a password-protected space that is completely separate from personal applications.

"Information that lives in the workspace can't be cut, pasted or shared with the personal workspace," he said.

But that divide can be awkward in applications where personal and business information need to intersect, such as calendars and email. BlackBerry 10 integrates both sets of information in calendars and email when users are logged in, but when they're logged out, access to enterprise data on those apps is locked down.

The separation between the two halves of the device is so complete "you can let your kid use the device when you're logged out of Balance. This is something other platforms just don't do," Gadway said.

BlackBerry's current user interface has fallen far behind rivals iOS and Android, something RIM is looking to reverse with BlackBerry 10. Gadway showed off BlackBerry 10's multitasking capabilities, saying the new platform would allow users to flow smoothly from one application to another.

Many BlackBerry users have stuck with the brand for its physical keyboards, and

Gadway set out to show the audience that the BlackBerry 10's virtual keyboard would be just as good as the physical standby thanks to its predictive text feature.

"This is the best typing experience on glass, period," Gadway said, adding that BlackBerry users have told him the new platform could get them to switch over from physical QWERTY keyboards. "I can type just as fast, if not faster, than I can on my Bold 9900."

Applications have also been a weak point for BlackBerry, which has lagged behind its competitors in terms of the variety of apps available on its platform.

Gadway announced that developers can now begin submitting BlackBerry 10 apps to BlackBerry App World, indicating that RIM is looking to get a jump on app development for its new platform.

RIM's turnaround effort hinges in large part on the success of BlackBerry 10, but the launch of the platform has been repeatedly delayed, dampening investor confidence in the smartphone maker's attempted about-face.

BlackBerry 10 is now set to go before consumers during the first quarter of next year, missing the critical holiday shopping season.

The most recent numbers from comScore put BlackBerry's share of the U.S. smartphone market at 8 percent. Two years ago, that number stood at about 38 percent.

Those numbers weren't the focus of Bienfait's talk. Instead, she chose to present a forward-looking view of a company aiming to re-enter the market as a stronger competitor.

Bienfait encouraged CIOs to take charge of the BYOD trend.

"Employees want choice and freedom," she said. "This may not always be easy for us that are CIOs… but this is what employees need to be successful and it's our job to find the balance."

That doesn't mean letting employee-owned devices flood the marketplace, Bienfait said, touting RIM's BlackBerry Mobile Fusion mobile device management platform. The platform, set to be renamed BlackBerry Enterprise Service 10 supports both RIM's own platform, as well as iOS and Android – a telling indicator of RIM's weakened competitive position.

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