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Business English News 14 – Battle of the Mobile Platforms

Discussion Questions

1. Which mobile platform do you prefer and why?
2. What changes to mobile phone culture have you noticed among your friends and colleagues over the last 5 years?
3. Has your social or business life benefited from the advances in mobile phone technology?

Transcript

The **battle for smartphone supremacy** has **reached new heights** in recent months, with **industry heavyweights** Apple and Google leading the charge over long-time mobile **powerhouses** like Research in Motion and Windows. Much has changed since the early-90s, when IBM-Bellsouth introduced the world to the somewhat **clumsy** 'Simon'. As eHow.com recalled:

*Selling for \$899, the Simon was a touchscreen mobile phone and **PDA** that also offered fax capabilities. Due to its **hefty** price and **bulky** design, the Simon failed to **catch on** with the masses.*

It took some years to take off, but the Symbian Operating System (OS) helped launch smartphones into the **mainstream**, leading all OS's from 1996 to 2011. From a report by TechNews.com:

*Ericsson's R380 was the first phone **to ship** with the Symbian OS, which because of its **open-source** nature, would gain popularity around the world, only to be **unseated** by Android earlier this year.*

Canadian tech giants Research in Motion (RIM) **stepped into the field** in 2002 with its **game-changing** Blackberry, directly **targeting** the business community. After some trial and error, Blackberry took an important step toward today's mobile communication culture. As explained by Network World:

*It was still confined to business executives that wanted to take their office everywhere with them, however for the first time there was a mobile device that was **optimized for** wireless email use and it was this model that **set the trend** for the rest.*

With the **plethora** of options increasing every year, it was the operating system that began to target specific audiences. The Next Web noted:

*Some IT departments refused to work with anything other than BlackBerry, setting up RIM to take a **formidable** hold over the corporate world **for years to come**.*

As Blackberry **pulled ahead of the pack**, **racking up** more than 12 million users

by 2007, it was the *instant* success of Apple's *iPhone* that pushed smartphones to the multi-billion dollar industry it is today. Network World continues:

*The **much-hyped** and subsequently **much-loved** iPhone hits the shops and sells by the **bucketload**.*

With its **slick** touchscreen and user-friendly interface, Apple then **opened** its **iOS platform** to developers, creating 'The App Store'. Beginning with just 552 (five-hundred *and* fifty two) applications, it now claims more than 500,000 apps, and a **jaw-dropping** 15 billion downloads. In January 2010, Fierce Developer remarked:

*Consumers downloaded more than 10 million apps in the first three days and 60 million in the first month, a \$21 million **windfall** for Apple's developer partners.*

Google **joined the party** in 2008 hoping to create an alternative to the iPhone, with its own open-source OS, Android. According to a post from PC Advisor:

*What was immediately clear was that Android was no **rough-and-ready** attempt to do something a little bit different with a **subtly** enhanced look. The interface was clear and **uncluttered**, while the navigation was fast and **to the point**.*

This all occurred as RIM was **asleep at the wheel**, and in 2011 their stock dropped 75%. After technical problems caused the BlackBerry Messenger service **to go down** for 3 days, many users and investors started to consider alternative platforms. From Mobility Feed in Oct. 2011:

*According to a **survey**, out of the 4,000 BlackBerry users **polled**, two thirds are planning to **jump ship** once they have completed their **contract**. Some even want **to ditch** their phone **ASAP**.*

While Apple and Google enjoy their success, and RIM **licks its wounds**, Windows has **entered the fray** with its own version of the **next-best-thing**. Plugged In had this to say:

*Despite users of the OS **raving** about it, Windows Phone has remained a **niche**. In 2011 it only accounted for 2% of the smartphone market.*

Apple's incredible start to 2012 with the announcement of record-breaking net **income** of \$13 billion on **revenue** of \$46 billion could be yet another **nailed in the coffin** for Blackberry. From Canadian TV:

*The **blowout results** are yet another painful reminder to rival Research in Motion Ltd. investors about just how much the Waterloo, Ontario company **lags behind** its main competitor in the high-end smartphone market.*

The '**cool factor**' of Apple's iPhone, the '**geek factor**' of Android's open-source OS, and the **rise and fall** of the rest of the pack will certainly bring great changes to the smartphone industry in 2012. As summed up by The Verge:

Despite the best efforts of competing companies, it's increasingly looking like "smartphone" means iOS and Android.

Vocabulary

Battle for supremacy: competition to hold the role of leader, ruler, or top position; "Apple and Google are battling it out for leadership of the smartphone market."

Smartphone: a mobile phone that includes advanced functionality beyond making phone calls and sending text messages including the capability to display photos, play videos, check and send e-mail, and surf the Web.

To reach new heights: achieve a new and highest level of success/achievement; "After living abroad for a year, his language skills reached new heights."

Industry heavyweights: companies or corporations which lead their respective field; "Taco Bell is competing with industry heavyweights McDonalds and Burger King for a piece of the fast-food market."

Powerhouses: see '*industry heavyweights*' above.

Clumsy: awkward or uncomfortable.

PDA: Personal Digital Assistant

Hefty/bulky: large, substantial, or heavy in size or amount.

To catch on: to become popular or interesting among much of the public; "After the release of the iPad, tablet computing quickly caught on with the masses."

Mainstream: the current thought or trend of the majority; "2012 may be the year when mobile payment technology moves into the consumer mainstream."

To ship: to deliver or release a product. Also, more commonly, to send products/goods by post, air, or boat.

Open-source: a program in which the source code is available to the general public for use and/or modification from its original design free of charge; "Many open-source options for top computer software are available for free."

To unseat: to replace or remove from a position; "Republican candidates are hoping to unseat President Obama in this year's election."

To step into the field: to enter a competition or market.

Game-changing: completely or significantly alter the dynamics of a competition; "The game-changing moment was when the CEO announced to the staff that he would resign."

To target: having a specific direction/goal for sales or marketing; "Prime Minister Harper is targeting Canada's retirement system for future reforms."

To optimize for: to make something as effective, efficient or useful as possible; "Linux operating systems are optimized for computer programmers."

To set the trend: to be the individual or company who determines what is popular; "Models and fashion designers set the trend at the Milan fashion show each year."

Plethora: having an excess or surplus; "When choosing a new computer, there are a plethora of options to consider."

Formidable: inspiring respect by being large, powerful, or capable; "Roger Federer will face a formidable opponent this weekend in Rafael Nadal."

For years to come: for many years in the future.

To pull ahead of the pack: take the lead over the rest of the group.

To rack up: acquire or receive a lot of something; "He has racked up a lot of speeding tickets since buying a new Ferrari."

Much-hyped: having a lot of interest or excitement in something; "The much-hyped wedding of William and Kate attracted thousands of visitors to London in 2011."

Much-loved: having a lot of love for someone or something.

Bucketload: as much as a bucket can hold, a lot; "There were bucketloads of people waiting to meet the football players after their match."

Slick: nice, cool, impressive, or fun.

To Open: Allow access to an area, idea, or product; "The new manager is open to any creative ideas from his team."

Platform: combination of hardware and software, which allows the software to function; "The platform makes the telephone very simple to use."

Jaw-dropping: causing great amazement or surprise; "My jaw dropped when I saw how expensive the hotel bill was!"

Windfall: an unexpected gain or advantage; "Money management is important after a windfall like winning the lottery."

To join the party (very similar to *'step onto the field'*): to enter a competition or market.

Rough-and-ready: unfinished and quickly prepared, but ready for use; "His rough-and-ready approach to his work is opposite to his very organized colleagues."

Subtly: difficult to notice or understand; subtle.

Uncluttered: clean and organized, with few unnecessary objects; "Mike's office is now uncluttered after moving to a new department."

To the point: clear and straightforward.

To be asleep at/behind the wheel: not doing one's job properly or carefully; "After falling asleep at the wheel, he lost his biggest clients' business."

To go down: to fail or stop working; "Our computer system have been down for 3 hours for general maintenance."

Survey/poll: a formal collection of opinion to determine a general view of a situation; "The results of the survey showed that English is the most popular second language, followed by Chinese."

To jump ship: to leave, quit, or resign one's post or position, especially when there is a difficult task; "According to the reports, Francesco Schettino was one of the first officers to jump ship while the boat began sinking."

Contract: a written or verbal agreement with the intention of creating a legal obligation; "Ben signed a contract agreeing to work with the company for 5 more years."

To ditch: to throw away, quit, or leave; "We ditched class early so we could watch the football match."

To lick (one's) wounds: to recuperate or recover from a defeat or loss; "After losing his job, he went home to lick his wounds."

To enter the fray: join the competition.

Next-best-thing: the thing that is best if you cannot have what you really want; "I wanted the job in Milan, but they sent me to Rome, which is the next best thing."

To rave: to speak very highly or positively of a person or situation; "Critics have been raving about the new Margaret Thatcher film."

Niche: an area or position which is exactly suitable for a small group of the same type; "By being the only business in the city who sells that product, Marco has created a niche for himself."

(A) Nail in the coffin: an action that will cause something to end; "The report on the effects of smoking is another nail in the coffin of the tobacco companies."

Blowout (results): one-sided or lopsided conclusion in which the final outcome heavily favors one side; "IBM reported blowout results for the second quarter with a 50% increase in sales and revenue."

To lag behind: to trail or be delayed; "Because everything was closed during the Christmas holidays, we're lagging behind on this project deadline."

Cool factor/geek factor: what makes something 'cool' or 'geeky'; "There's a certain geek factor about MacBook computers that make so many people want one."

Rise and fall: the increase and decrease of a system or object; "The new parents watched the rise and fall of the baby's chest while she was sleeping."

Rest of the pack: less important or successful members of a group of similar entities (such as companies from a particular industry); "Samsung is now far ahead of the rest of the pack in Smartphone sales."

Review Quiz

1. Which of the following does NOT match the other 3?
 - a. Industry heavyweight
 - b. Tech giant
 - c. Smartphone
 - d. Powerhouse

2. The _____ media has spent a lot of time covering the elections.
 - a. Clumsy
 - b. Mainstream
 - c. Formidable
 - d. Jaw-dropping

3. He is a _____ boss, and is always looking for a certain X-_____ from his team.
 - a. Much-respect / factor
 - b. Much-respected / factory
 - c. Much-respect / factory
 - d. Much-respected / factor

4. Which of the following is closest in meaning to poll/survey?
 - a. Questionnaire
 - b. Platform
 - c. Income
 - d. Jaw-dropping

5. According to the article, which companies are currently doing the best?
 - a. Google and Android
 - b. Blackberry and Window
 - c. iOS and Blackberry
 - d. Google and Apple

6. According to the article, which of the following is not related to the difficulties that RIM is currently having?
 - a. Technical problems
 - b. Poor management
 - c. Financial difficulties
 - d. Poor product

7. "Be careful when you drive! The snow has made the roads very _____."
 - a. Formidable
 - b. Plethora
 - c. Slick
 - d. Uncluttered

8. The F1 drivers are _____ in the final laps of the race.
- a. Battled for positions
 - b. Battling for posts
 - c. Battle for post position
 - d. Battling for position
9. Which of the following is a synonym of '**step into the field**'?
- a. Pull ahead of the pack
 - b. Join the party
 - c. Set the trend
 - d. Reach new heights
10. After a week at the most expensive hotel in Shanghai, we _____ a very large bill.
- a. Racked up
 - b. Bucket loaded
 - c. Caught on
 - d. Raved on

Answers

Review Quiz

1. = c. Smartphone
2. = b. Mainstream
3. = d. Much-respected / factor
4. = a. Questionnaire
5. = d. Google and Apple
6. = b. Poor management
7. = c. Slick
8. = d. Battling for position
9. = b. Join the party
10. = a. Racked up

Online Practice

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