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## RIM: Vodafone rejected first BlackBerry Storm

### CEO admits first attempt wasn't good enough

by Katie Scott published on 10 October 2008

RIM's CEO Mike Lazaridis has admitted that the company's first attempt at making the BlackBerry Storm was rejected by Vodafone for not being cutting edge enough.

"I thought that when we put both 3G Network technologies, Quadband Edge, GPS and a powerful CPU and high-performance graphics cards on one tiny board - I figured that that was enough of a breakthrough and Vodafone sent me packing!"

The development of the Storm, which the RIM CEO says was driven by Vodafone and Verizon, was a pretty daunting task.

But in just over a year, working from a concept design that RIM "had in a drawer", the company has created a smartphone. Jens Schulte-Bockum from Vodafone is confident "will capture imaginations".

As world starts to live up to the reality of an economic slowdown, the release of the high-end consumer focused BlackBerry Storm could be perfect timing.

"The market is growing five times faster than that for regular phones in North America. In fact, regular phones went down. Worldwide, the growth is three or four times faster than all of the other phones", says Lazaridis, on the growth in popularity for smartphones, in an intimate briefing the eve before the new touchscreen BlackBerry Storm broke, to Pocket-lint.

But up against the Apple iPhone 3G and the long awaited Google Android G1 is BlackBerry going to be able to compete in what is a new market for it - the consumer space?



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"A lot of the other companies are now repositioning, where as we've been focused on smartphones for 15 years. But I think the problem for all of us out there is all of us are having problems keeping up with the growth of smartphones."

The move into the consumer arena, with a phone that offers the BlackBerry heritage for email and internet browsing, adds a new touch technology and multimedia facilities, was a natural one, he adds.

"We had enormous competition in the enterprise space, but we developed our technology to get ready for 3G, for 3.5G, and all of a sudden, we noticed that people were buying our 8700s for personal use."

"We then went to our engineers and said, 'Can you build us the smallest smartphone possible?' They came up with the Pearl, which was a big hit."

"People were seeing BlackBerry as a status brand. It represented success in business and so consumers started buying it."

"As we drove costs down with improved technology, we saw massive growth with the Pearl and the Curve. It then seemed a very natural thing for us to get together with Verizon and Vodafone and say how do we take the success we have in the enterprise space, and shift it to the consumer space?"

Schulte-Bockum added: "We think the Storm will appeal to people who are interested in new functionality like browsing and using their emails, but don't want to move too far away from the multimedia facilities on their current phones. That's a pretty large target group".

He added that the new "click thru" tech that the phone includes is also more user friendly than the resistive touchscreens on the majority of

smartphones, which is a major appeal.

As Lazardis continued: "Touchscreens before have confused the act of navigating with the act of confirmation, or selecting. What we did is we combined a state of the art multi-touch capacitive touchscreen and put in a sub-system underneath that allowed us to add the dimension of pressure".

"It's far better than haptics. Haptics didn't work", he added.

As to the iPhone, which also boasts a capacitive touchscreen, Schulte-Bockum shrugs and says that there's plenty of room in the market, before moving on to talk about the BlackBerry App Centre - the second obvious comparison between the RIM and Apple offerings.

RIM has now released the SDK for the BlackBerry Storm to a "limited" number of developers, but more apps are promised.

Said Schulte-Bockum: "There are thousands of apps for the existing devices, and now the SDK is released, I'm pretty sure most of these apps will be transferred. If you have the fundamental device support, all you have to do is adapt it to the APIs".

"We think there'll be a vibrant developer eco system around the device."

But will BlackBerry be as open as, say, Google has been with the Android platform? Initial reports suggest that it will down to the carriers to vet applications, implying as we've already seen with Apple that certain applications like turning the iPhone into a modem for your computer won't be allowed.

The availability of apps, nevertheless, adds to a feature-set that brings the Storm into direct competition to the iPhone.

And with Vodafone promising a compelling tariff package (free with a £35 a month contract) when

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this phone arrives in the UK "in time for Christmas", the Storm, as Schulte-Bockum predicts, could be "a game changer", but could it become the star player?