

# G Watch: summer launch set for Google smartwatch

Software company hopes new 'wearable screens' will, in time, operate in tandem with smartphones

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LG have given a preview of its Google smartwatch, which will automatically deliver timely alerts.

Photograph: LG

Having put millions of wristwatches into retirement with its smartphones, Google is now hoping to persuade consumers to strap them back on this summer.

The company is to release the first watches running a version of its Android software designed for what it calls "wearable screens".

Google's thinking is that the new devices will give customers the information they need – such as traffic alerts or weather forecasts – without their having to ask for it.

On Tuesday, the Korean manufacturer LG gave a sneak preview of its version of the new Google smartwatch at an event held at Battersea power station in London. The

device is expected to be available in July, on sale for an estimated £180.

Called the G Watch, the device has a square format, with sides measuring about 5cm (2in), and as a bonus is being marketed as waterproof for beach outings.

The price tag is less than the £250 which Samsung wanted for the second edition of its poorly received Galaxy Gear watch but a little more than the most popular watch computer released to date, made by the Californian start-up firm Pebble.

The expectation is that the G Watch will be one of several similar products that some industry analysts confidently believe could replace smartphones made by the likes of Apple.

"We are still at an experimental stage," said Ronan de Renesse, an expert on mobiles, working at Analysis Mason. "There are a few glitches; there aren't many applications yet. But eventually there will be a strong move towards wearables. There may even be a day where we won't have a smartphone any more, it will all be wearables."

The G Watch will be followed by versions from Motorola, which has already released teaser videos showing the round-faced Moto 360 device, and others are planned from Samsung and the fashion watchmaker Fossil.

Google will unveil more details of the Wear software, the operating system for the G Watch and its Glass spectacles, at a conference on 25 June.

Teaser videos released by Google suggest that digital watches will do more than just replicate the functions already available on smartphones.

The G watch will be based on a notification system being developed by Google, which automatically delivers timely alerts. According to LG's UK head, Andy Coughlin, who spoke briefly about the new gadget at Tuesday's launch of the company's G3 smartphone, it can be paired with any recent Android phone, even those by other manufacturers. Its job, said Coughlin, will be to ensure we "receive useful information when [we] need it most".

With traffic updates on the device, commuters should be able to see how long the journey to their workplace will take. People who have booked a taxi could get an alert when the car is nearby. More exotically, the surfer unloading a board from the back of the camper van might get an alert on the local jellyfish.

LG is also reported to be working on a version that will incorporate a phone sim card so the watch will be able to make and receive calls when the smartphone is lost down the

back of the sofa.

Companies hope that the emerging smartwatch field will mark the beginning of a period when consumers adopt "wearable" computing, whether on the wrist or as a pair of glasses.

"This is the summer of wearables," said Francisco Jeronimo, IDC research director. "And this Christmas will be the first time consumers start looking at this category as interesting enough to give it a go."

Motorola will release its Moto 360 watch, also running on Android Wear, this summer. The speculation is that it will arrive in June with a \$250 price tag. With a large round face about 46mm in diameter and leather straps, Motorola's device will look more like the traditional watch, although keeping it on in the bath might not be an option.

Motorola is keeping the charging mechanism under wraps. The speculation is that the battery will be powered wirelessly while on a charging stand.

Google is hoping to make its mark ahead of Apple, whose iWatch could come on to the market as early as this autumn. Crucial to its success will be persuading developers to produce applications for its wearable gadgets, some of which will make these new products a must-have.

The market will start small, but could eventually be lucrative for manufacturers starting to experience a slowdown in smartphone sales, particularly when Apple wades in.

Katy Huberty, a Morgan Stanley analyst, forecast in February that the company could sell almost 60m wearable devices, at \$299 each in the first year, netting \$18bn in revenue.

A crucial part of the sales pitch could focus on the desire to get fit and healthy, and LG is already promising what it calls heart phones – headphones that monitor heart rate via the blood flow to your ears.

But Nike, which dominated the sports wearables category with its Fuel band, is laying off staff and has refused to commit to future launches of the device.

The ability to screen calls and messages without grabbing the phone may prove the most compelling application.

"When I went back to a normal watch it was like going back to the middle ages," said Jeronimo, who has a Galaxy Gear and uses it to answer calls at home. "I'm quite addicted. I have 10 watches in my drawer in my bedroom which I don't use anymore,

because I prefer my smartwatch."



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