



What will become of BlackBerry?

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BlackBerry is in a sticky mess -- and like last summer's jam, the company may be spoiling.

Facing dwindling prospects and unable to right itself, struggling smartphone maker BlackBerry said Monday it has formed a committee to explore "strategic alternatives" that may ultimately lead to a sale. Could new phones have fixed things? Could rival software patch the problem? Or is this the end of the line for the once-giant mobile company?

"The hardware just isn't very exciting," Mark Spoonauer, editor in chief of Laptopmag.com, told FoxNews.com. "And while there's a rumored big-screen Z30 on the way, it may be too late."

"What would you rather have, a 41-megapixel camera or a flick-typing keyboard?"

Die-hard fans on the Crackberry.com forums have enthusiastically traded updates to the 10.0 software, released in January in conjunction with new hardware meant to inject a shot of life into the company. The software is able to run apps from Google's rival Android operating system, and the unreleased version 10.2 will better integrate Android.

That's also unlikely to help, explained Sasha Segan, lead mobile analyst at PCMag.com.

"Unless you're an extreme geek, it doesn't bring any advantage to the average user," he told FoxNews.com. "It's not a game-changer."

Despite recent efforts, the business world has moved on in the past five years, while BlackBerry has stayed put. According to the latest stats from research firm ComScore, the company's share of the smartphone market shrank from 5.4 percent to 4.8 percent in the last quarter.

In the face of growing consumer demand for bigger, more colorful phones that run software from Google and Apple, the company announced plans to weigh a partnership or even sale.

"During the past year, management and the board have been focused on launching the BlackBerry 10 platform and BES 10, establishing a strong financial position, and evaluating the best approach to delivering long-term value for customers and shareholders," said Timothy Dattels, chairman of BlackBerry's Special Committee of the Board. "Given the importance and strength of our technology, and the evolving industry and competitive landscape, we believe that now is the right time to explore strategic alternatives."

But despite those slumping sales figures, there's still a need for a company like BlackBerry, with its laser-like focus on the enterprise market, Segan said.

"BlackBerry in some form still has a future, but it may not be selling physical smartphones in stores to average Americans," Segan told FoxNews.com.

"The business world needs solutions that are secure, clear, easy and safe. And BlackBerry is still the best provider of those solutions," he told FoxNews.com.

How did the leading smartphone maker tumble so far, so fast?

"BlackBerry really missed the whole transformation of the smartphone," Segan said. While Android-powered phones from Samsung, HTC and others swelled -- growing too big for the average pants pocket -- BlackBerry struggled to release any compelling new hardware.

The Z10, released to generally positive reviews in late January, looked essentially the same as every other smartphone on the market. It's a flat black hunk of plastic and silicon about the same size and weight as every other phone on the market -- and it wasn't sufficient to change the company's fortunes.

"Employees want more colorful phones with mainstream apps," Segan said.

The future for the company looks bleak, said IDC Research Director Francisco Jeronimo, whether it's selling part of the business or moving to a software licensing model.

"The only option it has is to sell the company," Jeronimo said bluntly.

"I don't think there is anyone willing to license BlackBerry 10."

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