

# Google to launch modular smartphone with switchable parts

Project Ara smartphone with swappable modules for the battery, camera, speakers and over 20 other bits to be trialed in Puerto Rico

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Google's Project Ara modular smartphone is to go on sale in Puerto Rico this year as trial for what the company considers to be the next evolution of the smartphone.

The Ara smartphone shell consists of a frame into which nine or so modules can be inserted, adding, removing or upgrading functionality without having to buy a new smartphone. The frame is designed to last five to six years.

Over 20 different modules from connectivity including Wi-Fi and 3G or 4G modules, to a new screen, new cameras, new speakers, faster processors, more storage or even health-monitoring devices for measuring blood glucose will be available by launch.

The modules should make upgrading a smartphone over the lifetime of the frame cheaper than buying a brand new smartphone.

Each module will be held in by magnets and swapped on-the-fly, allowing the functionality to be changed for what is needed at the time, whether that's a smartphone with twice the battery capacity to last longer or one with twice the processing power for intensive applications.

The trial in Puerto Rico, a US territory that falls under the same regulatory conditions governed by the US Federal Communication Commission, will see the smartphones and modules sold from food-truck like shops. Google did not reveal how much the phone would cost.

The appeal of a modular phone is obvious for early adopters, but the appeal for the mass market, who regularly keep their devices unchanged for two or more years is unknown.

"It's a great idea. In theory, to be able to select the components of the phone regardless of the brand is a great idea, but at the end of the day it won't work," said Francisco Jeronimo, European mobile devices research director for IDC. "It's not economically viable for any vendor to manufacture a phone and to provide software that will allow users to select components."

Jeronimo explained that when manufacturers create a traditional smartphone, the software be it Android, Windows Phone or another operating system, has to be tuned to the specific components within the device, the camera, the processor, the memory or any other piece of hardware.

Those that fail to do so properly produce a poor, bug-ridden and frustrating experience for their users, who see their phones malfunction.

"To be able to manufacture a phone that will work with different components without any problems when users change them about is a major issue," said Jeronimo. "For a project like Ara to be successful they need to test every single component in every combination, which is not an easy task, especially when you are talking about different components from different manufacturers."

**Project Ara: Google subsidiary aiming to develop 'highly modular smartphones'**

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