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Going vertical while still staying open source will be key to Google winning Android wars

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By Jason Baptiste

Microsoft, Apple, Google, BlackBerry, Nokia and many others have fought hard over the past decade. In 2014, we have already started to see the beginning of the next big war in computing. It is no longer about who is going to win mobile: it has already been decided who the main victors are. What is more interesting is who will win the war that is brewing in the Android landscape.

Apple and Android left standing
First off, we need to realize that the only two mobile players left are Apple and Android. Though I will often argue against "devices shipped" as a metric, it is pretty clear that Apple and Android are the victors there.

The problem is that Android is not controlled by one single manufacturer, not even Google, since it is open source software. So who then is going to win the Android war?

Vertically integrated players
Alan Kay once said, "People who are really serious about software should make their own hardware."

To understand who will win the Android wars, you have to first understand what it takes to even make it to the battlefield.

You cannot just be another original equipment manufacturer (OEM) that slaps Android onto a new stock device. We have seen this lack of individuality hurt HTC, while Samsung has started to rise to the top.

Those fighting the war have to be vertically-integrated manufacturers of software and hardware. This has always been Apple's approach and is behind its prominence in the mobile world. Here are the players at the table:

Samsung: Right now Samsung is the category leader. It creates great hardware and marries it with a modified version of Android that provides unique services such as Samsung Hub.

Amazon: Amazon has completely and utterly forked Android to its own liking. It is the only player in the tablet market right now, but you have to believe that it will enter the smartphone market as well. Amazon is a perfect example of an integrated player.

Google: Google unleashed Android into the world and has realized that it needs to reel it back in. With the purchases of Motorola and Nest, along with its Nexus lines of phones, Google realizes that it needs to win the war. Although, things do change with Google's recent divestiture of Motorola, which takes it out of the phone-making business.

Samsung is winning the war so far

Samsung is winning the war when it comes to Android. We see Samsung dominating with more than 53 percent of all Android traffic running on our platform.

The closest runner's-up is Motorola with just about 17 percent of Android traffic. Much of this is due to Samsung's ability to spend on marketing, diversification to tablets + phablets, and integration of unique features into its hardware. Consumers are not buying "Android," they are buying Samsung.

Google will end up winning in the long run
My belief is that Google will end up winning the Android wars in the long run.

The purchase of Nest is a significant move by Google. As we have already seen, it is adding a new division that is responsible for Google's hardware unit including based on the Nest team.

The man who created the iPod, Tony Fadell, will be leading it. Google has a strong consumer brand, unique software, and now the ability to create hardware. It will win the Android war over the next few years and it will be a true battle between Apple and Google.

There will be victors for new use cases
Google may end up winning in smartphones and tablets, but there are so many more use cases for Android.

If you were at the CES show in Las Vegas this January, you might have realized that Android will be everywhere your fridge, your car, your glasses, your watch and your TV.

Though it is likely Google will have a strong presence there, many other victors will emerge in new categories.

There is an opportunity in many new markets to combine a custom version of Android with great hardware to create a new, meaningful business.

Developers will be weapons of choice
Developer relationships are going to be key for each of the manufacturers.

Though an application may work across all app stores, whether it is a proprietary one like Amazon's or the Google Play store, specifically courting developers to integrate with devices is key.

Take a look at the partnerships that Samsung has done with both Dropbox and Flipboard. These partnerships have helped these startups grow tremendously, while adding real value to Android phones.

THE NEXT FEW years are going to be exciting in the Android landscape.

Now that we have clear winners in mobile, it is going to be a war like we have never seen in technology on the Android battlefield.

The ultimate winner will be the end-consumer as the best overall user experience is what it will take to be victorious.

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