



THE INDEPENDENT

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BlackBerry parent named top growth company in the world

By Nick Clark

Smartphone provider is top performer after cracking the consumer market

Barack Obama had to fight to take his into the White House, while Peter Mandelson was running Britain in Gordon Brown's absence on his from Corfu.

Devotees of the BlackBerry talk of their addiction to the device – many refer to it as a CrackBerry – and its rise and rise saw its Canadian parent, Research in Motion (RIM), named the fastest growing company in the world yesterday.

Impressively, RIM carried off the gold medal in Fortune magazine's annual survey of the 100 fastest growing companies in the first year the survey was opened up to non-US companies. The magazine ranks companies in terms of profits, sales and investment return over a three-year period to create its list of "the world's supercharged performers".

RIM was launched in 1984 in Waterloo, Ontario, to work out how to use wireless to send and receive emails on mobile devices, but by 1992 it still had fewer than 10 employees. In 1999 it launched its first BlackBerry.

A decade later and the company has a market value of \$44bn (£27bn), has sold 65 million devices around the world and has 28.5 million subscribers. Its dominance is largest in the US, where it commands a 56 per cent share of the smartphone market.

The group has consistently attempted to step out of Wall Street and on to Main Street, and half of its customers are now non-business. Carolina Milanesi, a research director at Gartner, said: "RIM pretty much started the smartphone phenomenon in the US; up until the iPhone there was no real competition. It took on the mantle of the PalmPilot, it was the Palm for email devices."

The company has not been as successful capturing the western European market, where increased competition from companies such as Nokia means it has 12 per cent of the smartphone market. "It is a different market in Europe, there is more choice and vendors with stronger brands. In the US it was driven by business, in Europe smartphones were more of a consumer phenomenon," Ms Milanesi said. She added that the company needed to be less dependent on the US market. "The competition is pretty fierce in Europe. They are making inroads into places like South Korea," she said.

RIM, run by co-chief executives James Balsillie and Michael Lazaridis, has a three-year average earnings-per-share growth of 84 per cent and revenue growth of 77 per cent; stellar figures that sent it to the top of Fortune's list.

The ranking will be especially satisfying to RIM as its rival, Apple, whose iPhone previously dominated the consumer smartphone market, was ranked 39, an eight place drop from 2008.

Second on Fortune's list was Sigma Designs. The chipmaker produces a core component in the Blu-ray player and is up from seventh last year after it secured a deal with Microsoft to put the device into its internet television sets. Behind Sigma comes the Chinese search engine group Sohu.com, which also offers online gaming and was selected to build and host the official website for the Beijing Olympics last year. The previous year's best performer, Arena Resources, an oil and gas driller in Texas and New Mexico, dropped to eighth in this year's poll.

Icon, a contract research company to the drug-making industry in Dublin, came in at 49. No UK companies made the list.

Fortune's Top 10: Fastest-growing firms

1. RIM
2. Sigma Designs
3. Sohu.com
4. Ebix
5. DG Fast Channel
6. CF Industries
7. Shanda Industries
8. Arena Resources
9. Bruker
10. Potash Corporation

Source: Fortune

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