

MOBILE

## Has BlackBerry failed as a platform for luxury brands?

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By RACHEL LAMB

Since a large number of luxury brands are steadily moving into the mobile arena, it is obvious that the smartphone reign of power has shifted over the past few years, and BlackBerry is decidedly absent.

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**Luxury Daily**

Once the most popular smartphone brand for business professionals and young up-and-comers, BlackBerry is threatening to fall by the wayside of other popular smartphones such as Android and iPhone. As luxury marketers move toward Google and Apple to develop mobile applications and sites, is it possible that Research In Motion's BlackBerry is failing as a platform for luxury brands?

"Unquestionably," said Scott Forshay, Austin, TX-based director of mobile strategy for Morpheus Media, a Createthe Group company. "BlackBerry has already lost the consumer mindshare war when it comes to the view the future of smartphone usage.

"They have become siloed in consumers' minds as a device for basic business functions and little else," he said. "For luxury consumers, this is more evident as luxury brands require a higher degree of brand aesthetic from a visual perspective.

"Additionally, the rapid adoption of the iPad has created distance between Apple and RIM

that is insurmountable.”

GRIM

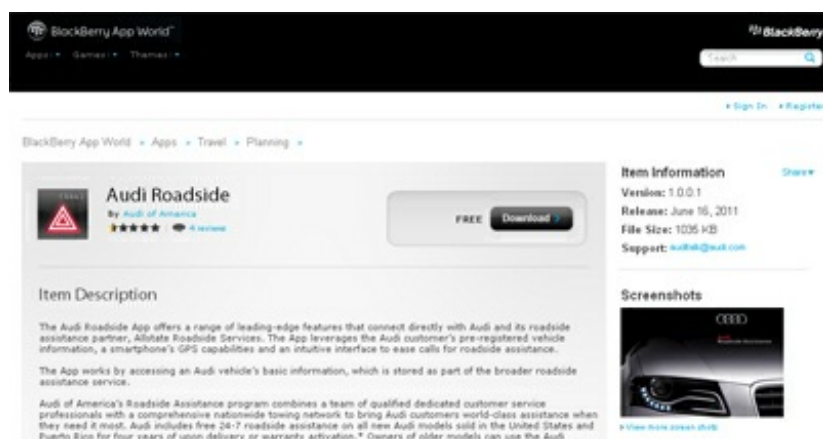
The biggest concern seems to be the difficulty in developing BlackBerry software.

“The most obvious answer is the difficulty and variability of developing on the BlackBerry platform,” Mr. Forshay said. “There are numerous BlackBerry operating systems and a wide variety of form factors that make developing comprehensively across the platform a challenge.”

A second reason, and quite concerning to RIM, is that the Blackberry smartphone user has been trained to not engage in the browsing experience due to historical inefficiencies, per Mr. Forshay.

Indeed, Apple and Google have developed easy-to-navigate app stores, while BlackBerry’s App World is not as intuitive or user-friendly as its peer among the iPhone, Android and Windows platforms.

Not too many high-end brands other than Conde Nast Traveler, Audi Roadside Assistance ([see story](#)), Starwood Preferred Guests and a few Lexus dealerships have apps in BlackBerry's App World.



### *Audi's roadside assistance app in BlackBerry's App World*

“RIM does not have a strong app ecosystem,” said Andy Friedlander, account manager at Ubermind, Seattle.

“Today, competing mobile platforms have better core features, and with corporations updating their security policies and infrastructure, BlackBerry is no longer the go-to platform,” he said.

Crown of thorns

Of 200 companies polled in the United States, 83 percent now let employees use devices other than BlackBerrys, according to a study by Bloomberg.

Moreover, of those employees who had another option, more than half chose devices other than BlackBerry.

“Two years ago, first-time smartphone owners chose BlackBerrys,” Mr. Friedlander said.

“Now these contracts are expiring, and a broad range of extremely attractive alternatives to RIM’s devices are available,” he said.

“IOS and Android are succeeding by being a part of users’ work and home lives.”

Many smartphone users now carry two devices – their BlackBerrys for more traditional business functions such as email and calendaring and their iPhones for a more immersive and connected rich media experience with apps that provide both functional utility and entertainment for consumers, per Morpheus Media’s Mr. Forsay.

Interestingly enough, BlackBerry does still hold a significant marketshare.

This could be why instead of marketing apps for the device, luxury marketers prefer to optimize sites and keep BlackBerry users in mind.

For instance, rather than develop an app to complement those for iPhone and Android devices, Gilt Groupe marketed its new mobile site to BlackBerry users ([see story](#)).



### *Gilt's Mobile site*

“Much of the affluent market is a professional market, where BlackBerry has traditionally dominated,” Mr. Forshay said. “The luxury consumer is familiar with the platform and are typically power-users of business functions that are the sweet spot for the BlackBerry.”

“BlackBerry has not capitalized on its early dominance in the space and has been alarmingly slow to innovate,” he said. “As Apple and Android devices become more adept at business functions, I see little room in the market for Blackberry as a major competitive player in the space.”

### Final Take

*Rachel Lamb, associate reporter on Luxury Daily, New York*

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