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The Evolution of the BlackBerry, From 957 to Z10

With BlackBerry 10 on the horizon, we take a look back at the long history of RIM's hot handhelds.

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January 28, 2013



RIM 957 Wireless Handheld (2000)





The highly anticipated BlackBerry Z10 is the latest step on a long road for one of the world's first smartphone makers. It's a chance for rebirth. If Research in Motion, Waterloo's finest, can pull this comeback off, it'll manage to do something none of its peers has done: Carve out smartphone success for more than ten years running.

The major U.S. handheld players ten years ago included Palm, Dell, HP, Nokia, Danger, and RIM. Samsung and HTC were just starting to dabble. What do those first six companies have in common? Four aren't making handhelds any more, and two—RIM and Nokia—are working hard to reinvent themselves.

When we ran our review of the RIM 957, we classified it as a pager. RIM had already been selling two-way pagers for six years at that point, but it's safe to call the 957 (and its sibling the 950) the first true BlackBerrys: they introduced the QWERTY keyboard and many of the icons and UI elements that would endure for the next decade.

The BlackBerry wasn't a smartphone yet, though. That came in 2002 with the BlackBerry 5810, which didn't even have an integrated microphone. You had to wear a headset. It took another year, and the BlackBerry 7230, to deliver a true smartphone. That was almost exactly ten years ago.

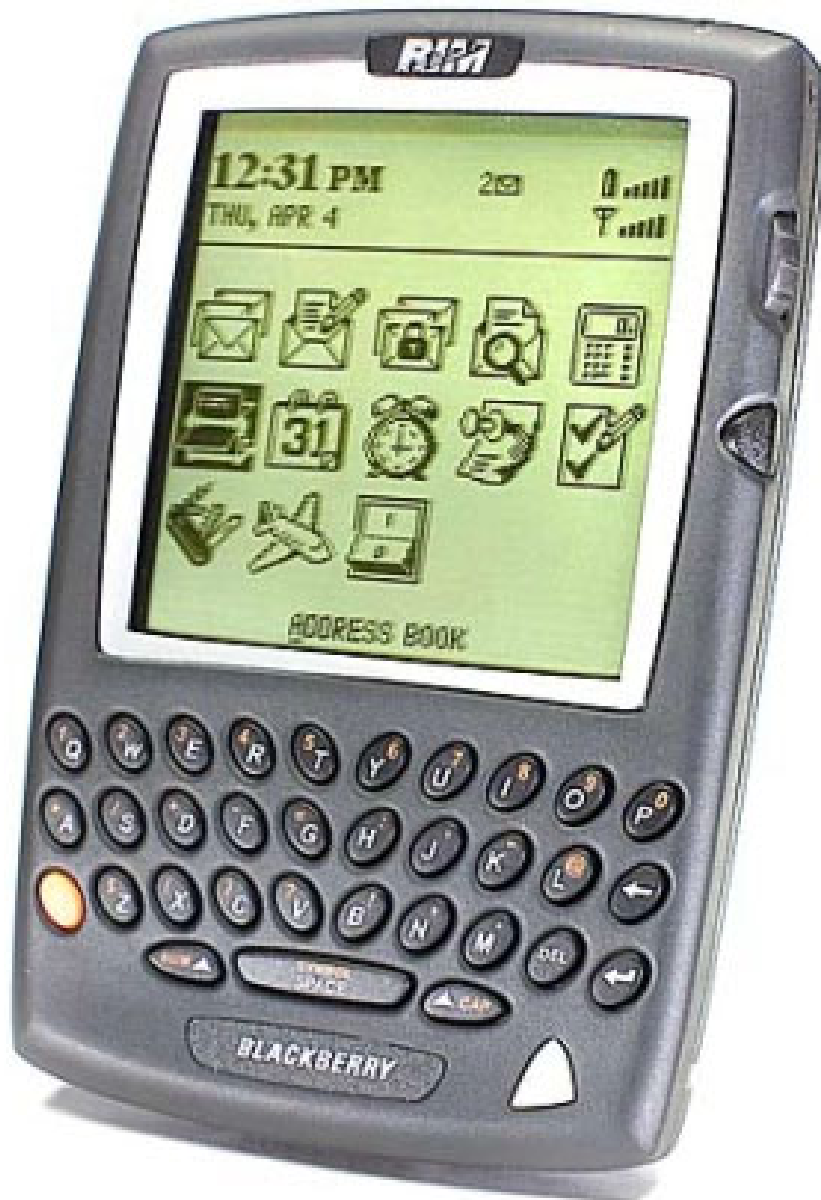
RIM rode high for the next six years. From 2005 to 2009, the BlackBerry brand dominated the smartphone market in the U.S., with models on every carrier. The OS advanced gracefully, adding media features but staying focused on messaging. Nothing could match BlackBerry's reliability for business customers. We called them "crackberries."

But then the company got hit by the one-two punch of touch screens and app stores. Just like Nokia, RIM was stuck with an OS that hadn't been designed for touch, and it stumbled when trying to graft that functionality on, resulting in the embarrassing BlackBerry Storm.

Touch worked much better on the Torch a year later, but the menu-heavy OS still had a lot of long lists and small touch targets. RIM also came late to the game of encouraging third-party apps, letting Google and Apple build a strong lead, especially on games. That's a painful irony, as BlackBerrys could install apps long before Apple and Google even made their first phones.

RIM has its faithful, and RIM still has a chance. BlackBerry 10 looks like the OS the company has needed for two years now: sleek and touch-centric, but still focused on messaging. Based on ONX, the new OS is prepared for this decade's hardware. We'll have full coverage of the

1. RIM 957 Wireless Handheld (2000)



The first true BlackBerry wasn't even called a BlackBerry, and it was a big-screen handheld without phone capabilities. For many people, it was a revelation: For the first time they could get their email on the go, assured that it would arrive on the handheld the instant it would have shown up on a desktop. The RIM 957 couldn't handle e-mail attachments and didn't have a Web browser by default, but back then, this was enough.

2. BlackBerry 5810 (2002)



The first BlackBerry phone was, in the words of our reviewer Bruce Brown, a "not-so-convenient combo." RIM hadn't reengineered the 5810 to include a microphone and speaker, so if you wanted to make a phone call, you had to wear a headset. The 5810 also supported SMS, which Brown had to explain to PCMag's readers: "Two-way SMS is a near-instantaneous method of communicating between wireless devices. It's more popular in Europe, but gaining currency in the U.S. as effective corporate communication."

3. BlackBerry 7230 (2003)



Now we're really talking. The BlackBerry 7230 had a color display, an integrated

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