Google kills the Pixel 4, making it the shortest-lived Pixel ever

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- The Pixel 4 XL.
  Ron Amadeo
- We have the white version, which looks great with the contrasting black accents.
  Ron Amadeo
- The top of the phone. There is a lot of bezel here.
  Ron Amadeo
- In the right lighting conditions, you can begin to make out the components hidden in here. Most cutouts are for the 3D face unlock system.
  Ron Amadeo
- Does the display look… kinda pink? That’s the ambient EQ display mode in action.
  Ron Amadeo
- Google camera block has two cameras: a 12MP main camera and a 16MP telephoto.
  Ron Amadeo
- In the right lighting, the camera block looks like a surprised robot. The two eyes are cameras, the mouth is the LED flash, and a microphone is a small beauty mark on the right. See the sensor on the robot’s forehead?

Let’s zoom in…
Ron Amadeo

- It’s a color sensor! Neat.
  Ron Amadeo
- The back has a soft-touch coating everywhere but on this “G” logo. You can catch a fingernail on the edge of it.
  Ron Amadeo
- We get a neon orange power button, and in this shot you can see the camera bump.
  Ron Amadeo
- There’s just a USB-C port, a speaker, and a microphone on the bottom. The slots are just for symmetry.
  Ron Amadeo
- There’s just a microphone on top.
  Ron Amadeo
- The black sides are metal with a heavy coat of paint on top, and there are actually plastic bumpers where the metal meets the two glass panels.
  Ron Amadeo

The Pixel 4 is dead. That’s the official confirmation that Google sent to The Verge after people noticed that the Google Store listed the phone as “out of stock.” The Pixel 4 started shipping October 24, 2019, so it was available for only nine-and-a-half months.

The Verge writes:

> *“Google Store has sold through its inventory and completed sales of Pixel 4 [and] 4 XL,” a Google spokesperson confirms to The Verge. “For people who are still interested in buying Pixel 4 [and] 4 XL, the product is available from some partners while supplies last. Just like all Pixel devices, Pixel 4 will continue to get software and security updates for at least three years from when the device first became available on the Google Store in the US.”*

The Pixel 4 had the shortest life span of any Pixel phone, only lasting half as long as the other high-end models. The Pixel 1, 2, and 3 were all for sale for around 18 months. The midrange Pixel 3a, had a similarly short lifespan and was discontinued after about 13 months of sales.

Both early discontinuations are starting the alarming trend of Google exiting segments of the smartphone market for months at a time. The Pixel 4's successor, the Pixel 5, is not out yet and doesn't even have a firm announcement date. Right now, the best guess for when Google will return to the high-end smartphone market is October 8, a date leaked by Google France as the Pixel 5 pre-order date. That would put Google out of the high-end smartphone market for two months. Google also had a one-month sales gap between the Pixel 3a and 4a. I can't imagine any other business being OK with shutting down sales for a month or two.

RIP to the worst Pixel phone

Due to its shortest-ever life cycle, the general reception of the phone, and the internal fallout after the device's launch, I think we can officially call the Pixel 4 "the worst Pixel ever." The $800 Pixel 4 and $900 Pixel 4 XL had a rough life. The phones were designed around Google's experimental "Project Soli" radar gesture system, which had the questionable goal of enabling an air-gesture system for a device with a giant touchscreen. The air gesture system never really worked reliably, but even if they did, the gestures didn't do much, only allowing for music control, silencing alarms, and answering calls. Project Soli was originally pitched as an input solution for smartwatches, where delicate finger movements could be tracked and used instead of the tiny screen. What Google shipped was a smartphone that required big arm-waving gestures that were made redundant by the ~6-inch touchscreen.

There were many other problems. The Pixel 4 was Google's first swing at a 3D face unlock system, and its version was slower than a fingerprint scanner. A lot of the phone felt like Google was trying to increase its profit margins by cutting down the phone's specs, and it was a poor value proposition compared to phones at similar prices. It used slower storage than the similarly priced competition. It had less RAM. It had fewer cameras and was shipping the same dated main camera hardware as the Pixel 2. It didn't have a fingerprint reader. It skipped out on the Wi-Fi 6 support that was offered by its SoC. Google cut down on the free cloud storage options offered with the phone compared to previous Pixels. Worst of all, the batteries were really tiny. Really the only highlight was the 90Hz display, but even that was limited to not run in 90Hz mode all the time, due to battery concerns.

Google reportedly was not happy with the Pixel 4, either. According to a report from The Information, the head of Google Hardware, Rick Osterloh, addressed the Pixel team before the phone's launch, with the report saying he "did not agree with some of the decisions made about the phone" and "in particular, he was disappointed in its battery power." Following the poor internal and external reception of the Pixel 4, two top executives left the Pixel team: Pixel General Manager Mario Queiroz and the Pixel's camera lead, Marc Levoy. Levoy's departure particularly stings since his team's camera software wizardry was the main bright spot of the Pixel line.

With the launch of the Pixel 4a, it wasn't clear why anyone would pick the $800 Pixel 4 over the $350 Pixel 4a. The 4a has a better design, the same main camera, a bigger battery, and the same amount of storage and RAM. Now people won't have to choose.

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