

Huawei announces its first operating system, HarmonyOS

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Ever since the Trump administration's export ban on Huawei threatened the company's Android phones, Huawei has been making claims that it didn't really need Android and could start its own operating system if it needed to. Today, Huawei's saber-rattling reached a new volume with the announcement of "HarmonyOS," Huawei's home-grown operating system. At the "Huawei Developer Conference 2019," Huawei gave a Chinese-language presentation on HarmonyOS, which included only a vague overview of the OS and no screenshots or demos.

HarmonyOS isn't quite targeting smartphones yet, and the OS will first debut on the "Honor Smart Screen" (which sounds like an Echo Show or Google Home Hub) and Huawei TVs. Huawei said an expansion to smartphones could happen sometime over the next three years, but for now, it wants to stick with Android.

As for what HarmonyOS actually is, the company described it as "a microkernel-based OS, distributed OS for all scenarios." Huawei says the OS will run across a range of form factors, and the company even pulled out the old "write once, run everywhere" claim for app developers. Huawei spent some time trash-talking the competition, saying Android's Linux kernel uses a resource scheduling model "targeting server load" and

lacks UI smoothness as a result. In contrast, Huawei promised Harmony would have a faster and more responsive UI. HarmonyOS will be open source, so hopefully we will see some third-party code reviews once the repo is posted.

XDA Developers attended the launch event, and the group was told by Huawei's CEO that the OS is not compatible with Android apps, but that it is "very easy" to turn an Android app into a HarmonyOS app. Developers will need to use a yet-to-be-released Huawei-made IDE that supports C/C++, Java, and Kotlin.

HarmonyOS reminds us a lot of Samsung's Tizen OS, and it mostly seems to be developed for the same reasons and headed down the same path. An entrenched hardware company is nervous about its over-reliance on Android. In response, just to have *something*, it develops its own operating system, which is mostly used as a bargaining chip.

Samsung's Tizen has been seen as the company's "Plan B" in case Google's Android terms get too stifling, and the OS even showed up on one or two phones. Tizen couldn't keep up with Android, though, and even if it could, what matters in the market is the apps, not the operating system. Whether it's Harmony OS, Tizen, Windows Phone, Blackberry 10, Sailfish OS, Ubuntu Touch, Plasma Mobile, or Firefox OS, a third operating system *from anyone* will have a huge problem in the market because it won't have any apps.

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