

Samsung is about to find out if Ultra is enough

I don't often get asked about the phones I'm testing when I'm out and about, unless it's a folding phone. Then I usually hear some version of the same thing: "Oh, I thought about getting one of those! But then I just got a [insert slab-style phone name here]." My anecdotal data matches the actual sales figures; there are many more people curious about folding phones than there are buyers of folding phones. Samsung would very much like that to not be the case, and, by all indications, it's about to pull out all the stops at its Unpacked event on July 9th. But is putting the Ultra name on a folding phone enough?

The weak sales are not for lack of trying – Samsung has been trying to sell us on foldables for a good chunk of the last decade, and Google also got in the game a couple of years ago. Motorola has had substantial success selling clamshell-style flip phones; Counterpoint Research found that the brand's foldable market share grew 253 percent year-over-year in 2024. But that's a bigger piece of a very small pie. TrendForce estimated that foldables made up just 1.5 percent of the overall smartphone market in 2024. In the US, Samsung was the earliest and loudest folding phone maker, but a half dozen iterations of folding phones hasn't managed to make a significant dent.

The company has all but confirmed that we'll get an Ultra-branded Fold for the first time, with a thinner profile to rival the recent efforts from Honor and Oppo. The Z Flip 7 is likely to get a bigger, Razr-style screen that covers most of the front panel, and we might see a cheaper FE version with

the old cover screen design. That all seems to address a couple of common complaints about foldables: they're too pricey and come with too many tradeoffs compared to a slab-style phone.

I'm not quite sure it'll be enough, though. Foldables remain more susceptible to damage from dust than a standard flagship phone – and repairs can be pricier. Despite saying years ago that it's pursuing full dustproofing, Samsung doesn't seem to have cracked the code on a fully IP68-rated foldable just yet. Taking a chance on an expensive phone that's less durable than your typical \$1,000 flagship? That's kind of a big ask, especially with prices on everything else we buy going up, too.

It's not all doom and gloom for foldables, however. Analysts are putting a lot of stock in rumors of a folding phone from Apple coming in 2026. An iFold or whatever it might be called could help expand the market, at least in the US, and maybe that rising tide would float Samsung's boat, too. Maybe a couple of new models hitting different price segments is enough to get Samsung's marketshare growing again – a strategy that has worked well for the company in the past. Maybe an Ultra foldable with ultra specs will convince some people who were on the fence about folding phones. And if anyone was holding out for an extra hinge, well, Samsung might just have that covered, too.

Photography by Allison Johnson / The Verge

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