The Pixel 8’s best new feature is guaranteed updates

When Google announced the Pixel 8 and Pixel 8 Pro today, it added a feature no other phone can compete with: both devices will get Android OS updates, security updates, and new feature updates for the next *seven years.* That’s a very big deal! Ongoing support is the difference between a phone that works and a phone with gaping security holes that needs to be thrown out. There’s a very real argument to be made that this is the biggest thing Google announced today.

The promise is particularly notable for an Android phone, where OS support can often drop off after just a few years. By way of comparison, the Pixel 7A and Pixel Fold, both phones Google announced this year, will lose software support in 2026 and security updates in 2028 — that’s only three years of promised software updates for either, and one of those phones sells for $1,799.

That support promise will no doubt pressure other manufacturers, too. Samsung only promises four years of OS updates and five years of security fixes for the Galaxy S23 line, which starts at around $800, and its much pricier Z Fold 5. And Apple, despite having a great track record for ongoing OS updates, makes no promises at all. (Google’s only real competitor here is Fairphone, which promises a solid five OS upgrades, but it’s far from a major player in the phone market.)

There are a few reasons why Google is now able to make this promise. A big one is the Tensor chip that lives inside Pixel phones — like Apple, Google now controls its processor and doesn’t have to rely on manufacturers like Qualcomm to

maintain software support for old chips. That can be a real roadblock, as Fairphone pointed out a few years ago. (Google perhaps could have made this commitment earlier since we're three generations into the Tensor series.)

Google has also increasingly broken Android up into smaller components. The company baked Project Treble into Android Oreo as a "modular base" that drew lines between parts of the OS, making it easier for Google and third-party manufacturers to add features without concern about breaking other ones. That later led to Project Mainline, which did a similar thing for security features.

And Android features have been increasingly broken up across releases. There are fewer flagship features with each major version, and among their small assortment of tech improvements, some inevitably get pushed to feature drops or later updates.

That means it's better not to think of Google's promise as seven "full" versions of Android, so much as seven years' worth of updates, whatever it is they contain. There are also real questions for Google to answer around what "feature drops" these phones will get — even onstage today, the company gated software features exclusively to its Pro phone. It's not as meaningful of a commitment if Google arbitrarily picks and chooses which features go to any given phone.

On the whole, though, Google should be lauded for this promise. If it actually keeps it, the Pixel 8 series will be some of the longest-surviving smartphones of the decade.

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