

Ara challenger suits up for modular smartphone action

November 8 2014, by Nancy Owano



Credit: vsenn.com

The week closed with two days of nudges and signs that something new is on the boil in modular phones, and that the concept could see some very interesting action in 2015. Android Authority said "things are [about](#) to heat up, and fast." Project Ara may not be the only modular phone star act waiting in the wings.

A new project with strong security selling points is being talked about.

The phone, when it does emerge, will come with three layers of encryption, said Engadget. What is more, the user will get free access to a [VPN](#) network and a secure cloud service. Vsenn is the Finnish startup that will introduce the new phone. Android Authority referred to it in its headline as a "mystery modular smartphone project." It is and it isn't like Ara. The latter has a number of swappable components; this one has three: camera, the battery and the processor/RAM, said Mariella Moon, contributing editor of Engadget. The phone will also feature a replaceable back cover, she said. Android Central reported Thursday that the Vsenn website, "which is little more than a splash page for now, does claim a modular smartphone running Vanilla Android, and promises updates for a full four years after release." (Vanilla Android refers to an install of Android without any customizations.)

Added Android Central, "it will be interesting to see competition heat up as modular smartphones start to come to market."

What will it look like? No pictures yet. According to reports, Vsenn intends to release the product in 2015. According to a Friday [update](#) on Tom's Hardware, "the company will offer more information about the phone next week."

As of Friday, the Vsenn site still looked rather like a splash page; it read "A SMARTPHONE EVOLUTION IS COMING," and announced it was "co-founded by a former Nokia Android X Program Manager." The mission: to give everyone the power to create their perfect smartphone by using modular and upgradable hardware.

Lily Hay Newman in Slate Magazine looked at the bigger market picture, saying "the fact that other designers are working on modular smartphones is significant. So far, Project Ara and Phonebloks have mainly seemed to be working on a wacky and intriguing concept. Maybe modular smartphone [development](#) is about to get a lot more serious."

For some time now, said Android Authority, Google has been busy testing Project Ara, a modular smartphone that lets the user customize the hardware, able to swap out different parts to build a phone to one's liking. Never mind that no specific date has yet to be announced for mainstream release; Project Ara fans anticipate next year. Interestingly, reactions in comment sections among the tech sites reporting on Vsenn said that in general competition was good and they welcomed the news for that reason, while other comments expressed reservations that it was too early in the modular phone game to have a competitive product, only adding to hardware confusion, with competing platforms rather than an open platform. One such reply said, "we need a standard first and then let the OEMs battle it out on frames and modules."

Meanwhile, there is a message on a website from something called the Puzzlephone, designed in Finland, so 2015 could get even more interesting. This is a modular phone that the site said can be [personalized](#) at both operating system and hardware levels. "Android runs on Linux's kernel, both created by Linus Torvalds, a well known Finnish programmer. It is time to Open Source the most popular hardware in the world and it has to be done in a supply chain friendly way to ensure its quick spread and adoption," the site said, noting too that they are working hard to ship the first products during 2015.

More information: www.vsenn.com/

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