Puerto Rico market pilot set for Project Ara phone

January 15 2015, by Nancy Owano

[Ara Project](#) lead Paul Eremenko had news about where Ara is headed this week at the second Ara Developer Conference in Cupertino, California. Puerto Rico is the first key stop. Google is to test its build-it-yourself smartphone in Puerto Rico before any global launch is announced. The pilot will kick off later this year in partnership with carriers OpenMobile and Claro. Consumers with enough enthusiasm to mix-and-match phone parts will be able to take advantage of what the Ara enthusiasts call a "modular hardware ecosystem." The Ara premise

is to satisfy and provide an alternative to such questions as, why feel stuck with your handset hardware design and its parts? What if you could pick the camera you want for your phone rather than picking your phone for the camera? What if you could choose a camera from one manufacturer, a display from another, until you get the phone you want?

All in all, what if you could make your own phone, using interchangeable parts? People could snap together parts like cameras and screens as if they were children again, building fire stations with plastic blocks. That is from a consumer-delight point of view. From the developer view, Ara might speed development and innovation in the realm of separate components. With a frame holding all the parts together, users would add the features they chose by snapping them into the frame. Richard Nieva of CNET explored the question of why Google chose Puerto Rico for the market pilot. Eremenko said it was the ideal test bed because of its diverse user base, according to Nieva. There was a good mix in the population mix of smartphone and feature phone owners; Google said 75 percent of Internet access takes place on mobile devices.

Agam Shah, IDG News Service correspondent, said the first smartphones will go on sale in Puerto Rico with mobile trucks stopping first in Old San Juan, then Ponce, the second-largest city, then through the rest of Puerto Rico,.

According to CNET, Eremenko said he hopes the phone will have 20 to 30 interchangeable parts, or modules, from which customers can choose. Turning to development news, *Engadget* said Eremenko talked about the electro-permanent magnets that hold the modules in place, which have been moved onto the endoskeleton itself. Why does that matter? *Engadget* said "it means the people and companies trying to squeeze gobs of functionality into teensy modules have a little more room to work with."

The Project Ara FAQ page said they are making the module shells out of injection-molded polycarbonate plastic in the near term. "While we think it'd be pretty cool to 3D print electronics—and we're working on some first steps in that direction—we can't do that just yet. We did look at 3D printing module shells, and have been working on a production 3D printing system capable of putting out high-quality, consumer-grade materials."

Data gathered from the pilot will go into the worldwide launch.

"Ultimately," said the project FAQ page, "customers will be able to buy a complete Ara phone, configure one from scratch, or buy additional modules through the Ara Module Marketplace."

How quickly or widely will the make-it-your-way concept be adopted among smartphone consumers? *The Sydney Morning Herald* raised a point about consumer preferences. Technology reporter Hannah Francis quoted an analyst who said his firm's research showed that "consumers generally looked for an easy-to-use, all-in-one product with 'tightly coupled hardware and software' when buying a new phone."

More information: www.projectara.com/

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