

Flexible display talk: Smartphone might fold around your wrist

February 18 2019, by Nancy Cohen



Credit: TCL

A phone that folds? Smartphone vendors think it can capture imaginations as they work to come up with newer gee-whiz designs to sell phones. This month, there is one foldable phone in the wings that is capturing special attention because it can transform into a smartwatch.

Just imagine. Bend it and put it on your wrist. Why buy two separate devices when you can have a phone and smartwatch all in one. The

foldable phone is being worked on by TCL.

Did you think of TCL as a TV vendor and not involved with such phones? Get in line. TCL manufactures BlackBerry and Alcatel brand phones under license and news that they are into foldables came as a surprise to some.

Brad Linder in *Liliputing* said Chinese electronics company TCL may be better known in the US for its [TVs](#) than its smartphones. Shane McGlaun, *HotHardware* was one of many who recognized the name behind "a huge [line](#) of smart TVs with built-in Roku and other services."

The foldable phone that can be turned into a smartwatch is one of five designs in the works making use of flexible displays. Aamir Siddiqui in *XDA Developers*:

"The real [kicker](#) here is that the Chinese company is working on as many as five devices that will employ flexible displays. This includes two tablets – one with a clamshell-like inward folding display, while the other will fold its display outward; two phones—inward and outward folding; and a phone that curves into a smartwatch."

The report in CNET, where renderings and patent image filings were obtained, was widely quoted. CNET said that TCL Corporation could be busy working on up to five different foldable devices, with two of the devices as tablets, two as smartphones, and this design offering an attractive combination of smartphone, smartwatch and bracelet.

The phone appeared to be "tall and skinny," which would make sense if its form factor involved a wrap around the wrist.

Tech watchers will be able to keep an eye out for TCL at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, for details and progress. The dates are

Feb. 25—Feb. 28.

In the absence of details at present, Sean Hollister in *The Verge* posed a question, as "will it automatically snap into [place](#) if you smack it onto your wrist?"

A fundamental question, meanwhile, is if this is an item to be developed into a product any time soon. Shara Tibken in CNET: "TCL could change or scrap its plans. It's also [unclear](#) when the devices could hit the market."

Ben Schoon in *9to5Google* would like to see the concept bear fruit: "It's unclear how many of these designs the company actually plans to produce, but personally, I'm loving the concept that turns the phone into a slap-bracelet-style [smartwatch](#). It seems just practical enough to make that form factor [work](#)."

One thing is certain, that [smartphone](#) manufacturers are looking at folding smartphones, and their devices are expected to surface at the MWC later this month. Tibken said foldable devices were being seen as "the next major leap in [phone design](#)."

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