

RIM to unveil new BlackBerry phones on Jan. 30.

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TORONTO (AP) — Research In Motion said Monday that it will hold an official launch event for its new BlackBerry 10 smartphones on Jan. 30. The new phones are seen as critical to RIM's survival.

The Waterloo, Ontario-based company said Monday details on the much-delayed smartphones and their availability will be announced at the event.

The announcement comes as the company struggles in North America to hold onto customers who are abandoning BlackBerrys for flashier iPhones and Android phones.

RIM's current software is still focused on email and messaging, and is less user-friendly, agile and robust than iPhone or Android. Its attempt at touch screens was a flop, and it lacks the apps that power other smartphones. RIM is hanging its hopes on the BlackBerry 10 software. It is thoroughly redesigned for the touchscreen, Internet browsing and apps experience that customers now expect. The Canadian company said the launch event will happen simultaneously in multiple countries.

Jefferies analyst Peter Misek called it a make-or-break product release and said the date of the launch event suggests a release date in mid- to late February or in March.

A full touchscreen device is expected to be released first followed shortly after by a physical

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keyboard version.

BGC Financial Partners analyst Colin Gillis said the new phones won't be dead on arrival as some analysts have said because RIM hasn't lost the corporate market completely.

"Is 10 going to be the solution to retain that marketplace? We'll have to wait and see," Gillis said. "It's great they set a date, but the challenges are still formidable. It's not an issue of initial demand. It's an issue of sustained demand."

Gillis noted that RIM's launch of a tablet initially went OK but then demand fell sharply. RIM's tablet, the Playbook, uses software on which the BlackBerry 10 will be based.

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