

BlackBerry: is this RIP for BBM?

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Key words

Complete the sentences using these key words from the text.

sticker
rioter

innovation
handset

encrypted
upgrade

grapevine
limitations

app
deprivation

1. An _____ is a new idea, method, piece of equipment etc.
2. A _____ is someone who is involved in violent protests.
3. A _____ is a mobile phone.
4. The _____ is the way in which information spreads quickly from one person to another.
5. A _____ is a more sophisticated version of a smiley face and is used by some instant messaging applications.
6. An _____ is a piece of equipment or software designed to make a computer or mobile device more powerful.
7. If something has _____, it has disadvantages or weaknesses that make it less effective.
8. _____ is a situation in which people do not have the basic things they need to have a comfortable life.
9. An _____ is a piece of software that is designed to do a particular job, especially one that people use on a smartphone.
10. If a message is _____, it is protected by a code so that other people cannot read it.

2 What do you know?

Decide whether these statements are true (T) or false (F). Then check your answers by reading the text.

1. BlackBerry is an American company.
2. The London riots took place in the summer of 2011.
3. WhatsApp is an instant messaging service.
4. BlackBerry has more users than WhatsApp.
5. Sixty per cent of 16- to 24-year-olds in the UK use Facebook every day.
6. A single WhatsApp message can be sent to the phone owner's entire contacts book, whereas BlackBerry has a limit of 50 for a broadcast message.

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The Canadian phone remains a popular budget option. But the shiny, happy people holding handsets have all moved on

Juliette Garside

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- 1 Back in 2005, when BlackBerry brought instant messaging to the mobile phone, the company was just entering its boom times. While the iPhone was still a gleam in Steve Jobs's eye, BlackBerry's innovations ensured its smartphone was one of Canada's biggest exports.
- 2 Six years later, in the summer of 2011, as violence engulfed London and spread to Birmingham, Nottingham, Liverpool and Manchester, so effective was BlackBerry Messenger (BBM) at mobilizing the rioters that politicians called for the service to be temporarily shut down. But two years later, it is the users themselves who are pulling the plug.
- 3 As demand for BlackBerry handsets fades, the once noisy BBM grapevine is falling silent. Dozens of alternatives have sprung up to take its place, from Facebook's and Apple's own-brand instant messaging applications to independent start-ups such as WhatsApp and Kik (which is also Canadian). Free to download and use, they use the internet to swap text messages, pictures, voice clips, 'stickers', and even videos in WhatsApp's case, between most types of phones.
- 4 In an attempt to retain its following, BBM has been released on Android and Apple phones. Despite the competition, the response has been overwhelming, with an announcement that there have been more than 20 million downloads. But, despite the initial interest, many believe BBM's wider release will do little to save the service. "The move to bring BlackBerry to the iPhone is four or five years too late," says James Gooderson, an 18-year-old student who blogs on technology. "WhatsApp has removed the reason why young people would use a BlackBerry."
- 5 BBM claims 80 million monthly users after its upgrade, but WhatsApp has 300 million. Other services expose BBM's limitations: unlike Skype and Viber, it does not yet offer video or voice calls; unlike Path, it does not do location sharing; there is no video sharing, as on iMessage; and the stickers (a more sophisticated version of the smiley face), adored by kids the world over, are also unforgivably absent. Even the contacts and calendar sharing that BBM made possible on BlackBerry handsets have not migrated to the Apple and Android versions.
- 6 Messaging is moving from verbal to visual. Photos uploaded to Instagram trigger a wave of comments and Snapchat's pictures, which self-delete after ten seconds, have opened a world of other possibilities. Like BBM, all of these services are free for any phone with an internet connection. Yet as recently as 2011, BBM was so powerful it was credited with starting a revolution in Egypt; and, at the time of the London riots, it was a more urgent source of news than the television screen.
- 7 "We could see on our BlackBerry messages where the rioters were going next; TV news would catch up four hours later," said Jean-Pierre Moore, 28. He manages a youth club in Stockwell, south London, an area with some of the highest levels of crime and economic deprivation in Britain. Moore mainly communicates on an iPad now. He dismisses the notion that the BBM curfew urged by some MPs would have stopped the looting. "The social networking wasn't the reason," he says. "I know a lot of people who were out rioting. People had been angry for a long time. Mention the words 'stop and search' around here and you immediately have a room full of angry young men."
- 8 Nearly 80% of young smartphone owners regularly use a social networking application, says the research firm Enders Analysis, but two-thirds use more than one. Among 16- to 24-year-olds, 60% use Facebook every day but 46% use alternatives. "It's a much more complex, multifaceted environment," says Benedict Evans, a digital media specialist at Enders. "The smartphone itself has become the platform. All of these apps plug into your phone book and your photo library. Apps rise and fall like fireworks. Some, like Instagram, last; others disappear into thin air."
- 9 Thirteen-year-old Bennett has three devices, all hand-me-downs from family members. He keeps his BlackBerry for messaging, uses an iPhone over wi-fi to play games and makes phone calls on an HTC-branded Android phone. His friends are still on BBM – the four phone thefts at his school

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so far this term were all BlackBerrys. At the touch of a few buttons, a single BlackBerry message can be sent to the phone owner's entire contacts book – several hundred people in some cases; on WhatsApp, the limit for a broadcast message is 50. But, for Bennett, Instagram is now a major social network. "Instagram is Facebook without parents," he says. "Facebook has been taken over by the older generation. Once I saw my mum on Facebook, I deleted my account."

- 10 For families that may struggle to pay their heating bills this winter, the low price tag attached to buying and communicating on a BlackBerry retains its appeal. Unlimited BBM messages are available to anyone with a second-hand device and a £7-a-month deal from T-Mobile. But trust in the privacy of BBM's system has

been eroded. Part of the attraction to business people, revolutionaries, demonstrators and rioters was a belief that encrypted words sent over the company's secure servers could not be traced back to their writers. Prosecutions after the riots put an end to that belief.

- 11 Across town from Stockwell, outside the gates of a private school in well-heeled South Kensington, the older pupils all have Apple logos on their handsets. They all use WhatsApp. For many, BBM is a distant memory. "I still have a Blackberry, but I'm the only one," says a teenager standing with a circle of friends. And how does that make him feel? "Isolated," he replies.

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

1. Why did UK politicians call for BBM to be shut down during the 2011 London riots?
 - a. because so many BlackBerry handsets were being stolen
 - b. because the rioters were using BBM to communicate with each other
 - c. because most of the rioters were BBM users
2. Why does it seem unlikely that the release of BBM on Android and Apple phones will prevent its decline?
 - a. because some young people have now switched to WhatsApp
 - b. because BBM has a number of limitations
 - c. because BBM is too expensive
3. What is happening to messaging?
 - a. It is becoming increasingly visual rather than verbal.
 - b. All messages now self-delete after ten seconds.
 - c. It is becoming more expensive.
4. Which of these best describes what Bennett does with his devices?
 - a. He gives them to family members.
 - b. He has different devices but prefers to use his BlackBerry.
 - c. He uses different devices for different purposes.

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4 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a five-word expression meaning *an idea that someone has that has not yet been achieved* (para 1)
2. a three-word expression meaning *stop an activity, especially by no longer providing the money to allow it to continue* (para 2)
3. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *appear or be produced suddenly and quickly* (para 3)
4. an adjective meaning *much larger, stronger, more important than anything else in a particular situation* (para 4)
5. an adjective meaning *containing many different aspects, features or qualities* (para 8)
6. a four-word expression meaning *vanish suddenly in a mysterious way* (para 8)
7. a three-word noun phrase meaning *clothes or other items that have been used by someone and then given to someone else in the same family* (para 9)
8. a two-word adjective meaning *rich* (para 11)

5 Mobile technology – two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make two-word phrases related to mobile technology.

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. location | a. face |
| 2. voice | b. networking |
| 3. internet | c. sharing |
| 4. social | d. messaging |
| 5. instant | e. clip |
| 6. smiley | f. connection |

6 Word-building

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. During the 2011 riots, politicians called for BBM to be _____ shut down. [TEMPORARY]
2. According to the article, stickers are _____ absent from BBM. [FORGIVE]
3. Bennett uses his BlackBerry for _____. [MESSAGE]
4. People have lost trust in the _____ of BBM. [PRIVATE]
5. The article argues that BBM has a number of _____. [LIMIT]
6. _____ BBM messages are available to anyone with a handset and a £7-a-month deal. [LIMIT]

7 Discussion

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using BBM?

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KEY

1 Key words

1. innovation
2. rioter
3. handset
4. grapevine
5. sticker
6. upgrade
7. limitations
8. deprivation
9. app
10. encrypted

2 What do you know?

1. F
2. T
3. T
4. F
5. T
6. F

3 Comprehension check

1. b
2. b
3. a
4. c

4 Find the word

1. a gleam in someone's eye
2. pull the plug
3. spring up
4. overwhelming
5. multifaceted
6. disappear into thin air
7. hand-me-downs
8. well-heeled

5 Mobile technology – two-word phrases

1. c
2. e
3. f
4. b
5. d
6. a

6 Word-building

1. temporarily
2. unforgivably
3. messaging
4. privacy
5. limitations
6. unlimited