

# THE HANDELOT TIMES

EDITION LXIII

THE BEST B2B MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 2026 #63

**The  
Future  
of Electronics  
in a Deglobalised  
World**

**IFA 2026**

BERLIN · 4.-8. SEPTEMBER 2026

**STAND H27F-04**

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**Founder  
& Owner  
of Wolfsohn  
Hüseyin  
Kurtoğlu**



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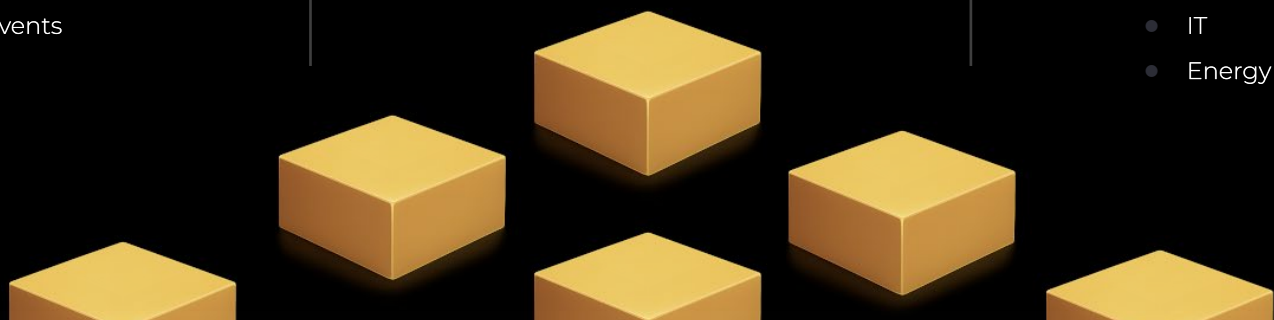
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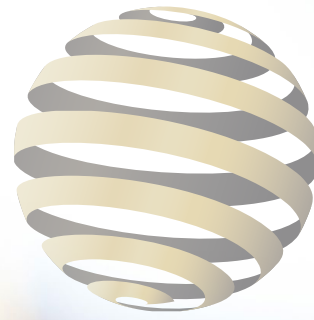
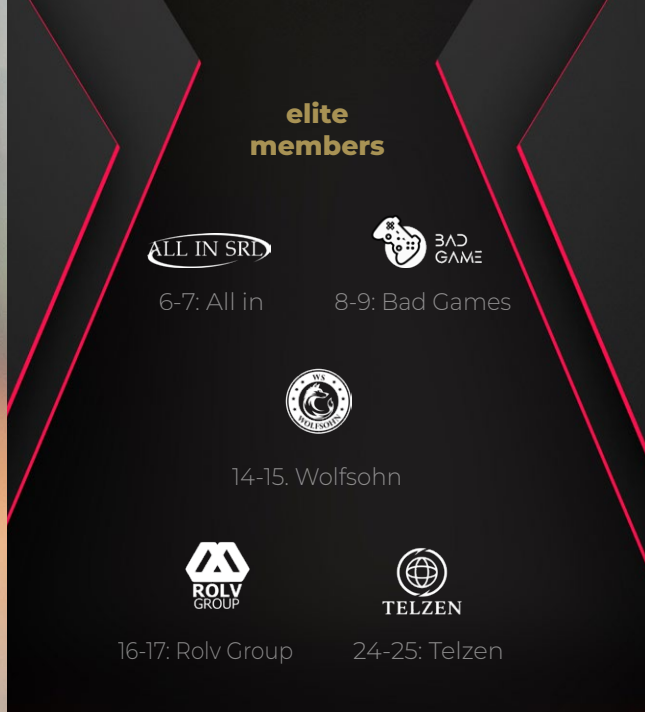
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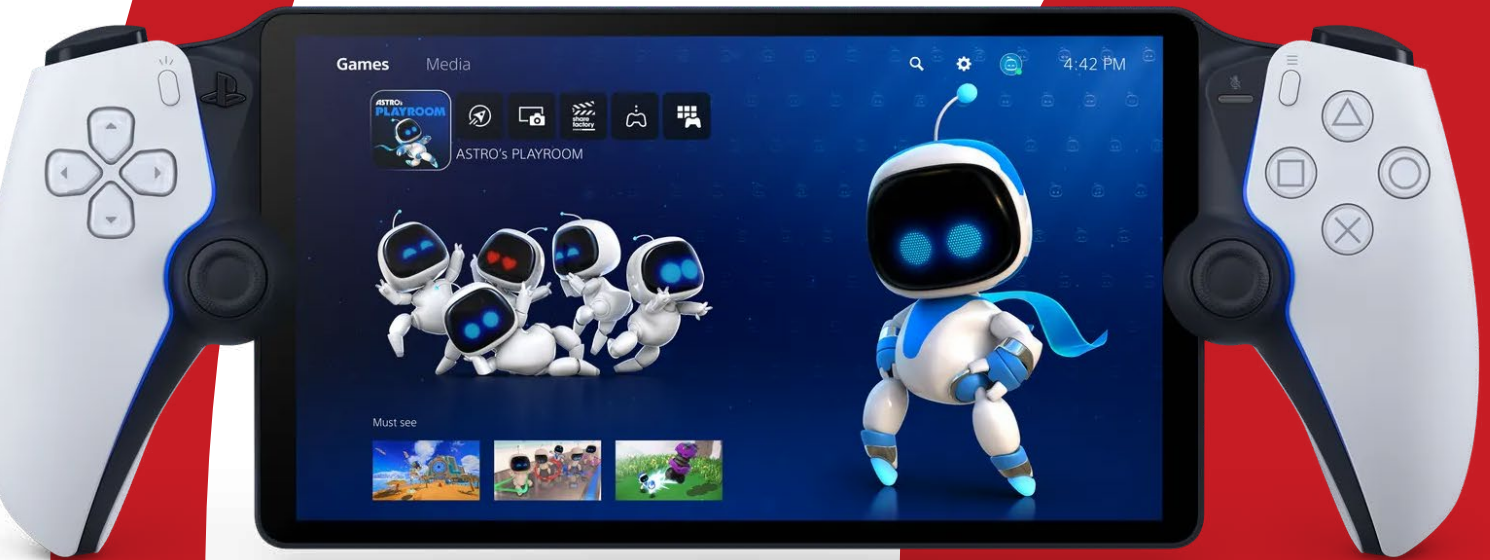
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# Interview with Hüseyin Kurtoğlu

Founder & Owner of Wolfsohn

## **1. MR KURTOĞLU, COULD YOU BRIEFLY INTRODUCE WOLFSOHN? WHAT IS THE HISTORY BEHIND THE COMPANY, AND HOW DID IT DEVELOP INTO THE B2B TRADING BUSINESS IT IS TODAY?**

---

Our family's entrepreneurial roots go back to 1984. Our group has been active in the local distribution of Siemens since 1996 and Bosch since 2003, and these long-standing activities and market relationships continue within our family-business structure. In 2021, we selected Germany as a strategic investment location and established Wolfsohn to develop our European B2B business. Today, we support professional resellers, online sellers, specialist retailers, wholesalers and distributors across Europe and in numerous markets worldwide. In parallel, we are expanding sales and distribution partnerships with innovative growth brands from Europe, the Americas and Asia. We are a technology-oriented business: we already use AI agents in internal processes, while a specialised team continuously develops our AI-supported purchasing, sales and analytical workflows. Our digital presence follows the same clear structure: [www.wolfsohn.eu](http://www.wolfsohn.eu) presents our corporate group, international orientation and partnerships; [www.wolfsohn.de](http://www.wolfsohn.de) serves as our B2B platform for products, current offers and direct customer enquiries; and at [www.wolfsohn.ai](http://www.wolfsohn.ai), we bring together our AI and technology initiatives. Our guiding principle is: Trust that helps your business grow. We therefore combine competitive branded products, targeted sourcing, dependable execution and long-term cooperation.

## **2. HOW DID YOU PERSONALLY ENTER INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND, IN PARTICULAR, THE ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY?**

---

My path is closely connected with the history of our family business. It taught me early that trading is not simply about buying and selling. Mar-

ket knowledge, reliability, a realistic understanding of pricing and stock, and responsible relationships with business partners are what matter. Over time, the business became more international and supply chains more complex. Expanding into Germany was therefore a natural next step: we wanted to combine our long-standing industry experience with the opportunities of the European single market and build a professional B2B network.

## **3. WHICH PRODUCT CATEGORIES FORM THE CORE OF YOUR BUSINESS TODAY, AND WHICH CUSTOMERS AND MARKETS DO YOU SERVE MOST ACTIVELY?**

---

Our core business covers consumer electronics, smartphones and accessories, audio products, small domestic and kitchen appliances, and personal-care and grooming products. We also cover smart home, wearables, gaming, IT accessories, health, toys, and refurbished or open-box products. Our current stock and pre-order offers demonstrate this breadth and include, among others, Samsung, Philips, Braun, Remington, Russell Hobbs, Sony, Casio, Sennheiser, Amazon, Canon, DJI, Dreame, Logitech and Xiaomi, together with growth brands such as Baseus, Blackview, Anlan, Kensen, Momax, QCY, SONOFF, Teclast and Veger. We clearly distinguish between brands whose products we trade through verified sourcing channels and selected brands with which we have direct or authorised sales relationships. Customers can access current stock offers or send us the brand, EAN, target price and required quantity, allowing our sales team to prepare a market-relevant quotation.

## **4. GERMANY IS ONE OF EUROPE'S LARGEST BUT ALSO MOST DEMANDING ELECTRONICS MARKETS. IN YOUR VIEW, WHAT DISTINGUISHES IT FROM SOUTHERN AND EASTERN EUROPE?**

---



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The German market is highly structured and transparent. Business partners expect complete product data, traceable origin, clear warranty and returns processes, and reliable delivery dates. Price and availability remain important, but documentation and compliance are equally decisive. In parts of Southern and Eastern Europe, we often observe greater price sensitivity, faster opportunity-driven purchasing decisions and stronger demand for particular volume products. This does not mean that one market is easier than another. Each has its own sales channels, brand preferences and payment practices. Success depends on understanding these differences and responding flexibly.

#### **5. HOW HAS DEMAND CHANGED OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS? IS THE FOCUS MOVING TOWARDS PREMIUM PRODUCTS, HIGH-VOLUME MID-RANGE DEVICES, OR REFURBISHED AND OPEN-BOX STOCK?**

Demand has become much more differentiated. Premium products remain attractive, particularly when brand, availability and price align. However, the largest and most consistent volumes are often in the mid-range, where performance, price and resale speed are well balanced. At the same time, refurbished and open-box products are becoming more important for both economic and sustainability reasons. Transparent grading, technical testing, clear battery-health information and defined warranty terms are essential in this segment. Buyers today are not only looking for a low price; they want a predictable overall package.

#### **6. WHAT ROLE DOES INTERNATIONAL SOURCING PLAY FOR WOLFSOHN, AND THROUGH WHICH SUPPLY CHANNELS DO YOU OBTAIN PRODUCTS?**

Sourcing is at the heart of our business, but its purpose is clear: to give customers better availability, broader



choice

and com-

petitive commercial

terms. Depending on the category, we source through manufacturer and brand channels, authorised distributors, established European wholesalers, and verified stock and special-lot sources. We also maintain direct relationships with selected growth brands from Asia. B2B customers can send us their regular requirement lists or current wanted lists. We then review suitable sources and prepare a concrete offer covering item, quantity, price, availability and delivery terms. In this way, our international sourcing network becomes a direct purchasing service for our customers.

#### **7. TRUST IS A DECISIVE FACTOR IN INTERNATIONAL WHOLESALE. HOW DO YOU ASSESS NEW SUPPLIERS AND CUSTOMERS BEFORE ENTERING INTO A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP?**

Trust must work in both directions. For new suppliers, we review company registration, VAT number, business address, bank details, product origin and, where relevant, authorisation evidence. New B2B customers also complete a structured ac-



count-opening process so that invoice, delivery and VAT information is recorded correctly. This gives buyers greater certainty: offers, order confirmations, invoices, delivery addresses and contacts are clearly documented. A new relationship can begin with a controlled first order and, following successful cooperation, develop into regular offers, reserved quantities and individually agreed commercial terms.

#### **8. HOW DO EU COMPLIANCE, VAT RULES, WARRANTY OBLIGATIONS, ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS AND EXPORT CONTROLS AFFECT YOUR DAILY OPERATIONS?**

---

These matters are now an integral part of every transaction and also protect our customers from avoidable risk. For products intended for the European market, depending on the category, we consider CE and RoHS requirements, WEEE and packaging obligations, correct product labelling and traceable supply chains. For intra-Community transactions, VAT numbers, invoice data and movement of goods must be documented correctly. Warranty, inspection and claims terms are clearly agreed. Sensitive or export-controlled products may require additional end-use checks. For our B2B customers, this means a better documented, more predictable transaction designed for professional resale in Europe.

#### **9. LOGISTICS COSTS AND DELIVERY TIMES HAVE BECOME VOLATILE. HOW DO YOU MANAGE SHIPPING AND INVENTORY ACROSS BORDERS?**

---

Our warehouse and logistics location in Rödermark is the operational base. The facility is designed to store and handle more than 250,000 products. We combine available warehouse stock with order-based sourcing. Depending on the offer, customers can therefore purchase immediately available stock or plan larger and recurring requirements with us. We work with different transport and logistics partners and choose between parcel, express, pallet and freight solutions according to value, urgency and destination. Order and shipping information is communicated transparently. For customers, the final calculation is not only the unit price; it is the combination of availability, lead time, freight cost and dependable execution.

#### **10. HOW IMPORTANT ARE NETWORKS AND PLATFORMS SUCH AS HANDELOT IN BUILDING RELIABLE INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS?**

---

Platforms such as Handelot are highly valuable in international B2B trading because they combine visibility, market information and access to a specialised trading community. For buyers, Handelot offers an opportunity to compare current offers and identify verified potential partners. As a Handelot VIP Gold and Three-Star Trader, we intend to present relevant stock offers and product opportunities regularly. We also invite Handelot members to send us their wanted lists. Our objective is not only a single transaction, but a working relationship in which customers receive recurring relevant offers, fast feedback and a dedicated point of contact.

#### **11. WOLFSOHN WILL EXHIBIT WITH ITS OWN STAND AT IFA BERLIN IN SEPTEMBER 2026. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO PRESENT THERE, AND WHICH BUSINESS PARTNERS WOULD YOU LIKE TO MEET?**

---

For us, IFA is above all a platform for concrete face-to-face business discussions. In addition to manufacturers and distributors, we particularly want to meet professional buyers, online sellers, specialist retailers and wholesalers. Interested buyers can send us their purchasing requirements and wanted lists before the event or bring them directly to the stand. Our team can then evaluate suitable products, availability and commercial terms and prepare individual follow-up offers. Our focus includes consumer electronics, accessories, small domestic appliances, personal care, selected growth brands and innovative categories. We warmly invite readers of The Handelot Times to visit us from 4 to 8 September 2026 at the Reseller Park, Hub 27, Stand H27f-04 and discuss their current purchasing projects with us.

#### **12. WHICH DEVELOPMENTS WILL SHAPE B2B ELECTRONICS TRADING IN THE COMING YEARS, AND HOW IS WOLFSOHN PREPARING?**

---

The market will become more digital, more transparent and, at the same time, more regulated. Customers expect current availability, rapid quotations, structured product



data and reliable delivery information. Automated data exchange, API connections and data-based demand analysis will therefore become increasingly important. Refurbished and circular models will also grow, while brands exercise tighter control over sales channels. Wolfsohn is investing in digital B2B processes, more tailored customer offers, structured supplier verification, international brand partnerships and flexible logistics. Our aim is not simply to sell goods, but to supply customers regularly with relevant product opportunities and grow together over the long term. ■

**MEET WOLFSOHN  
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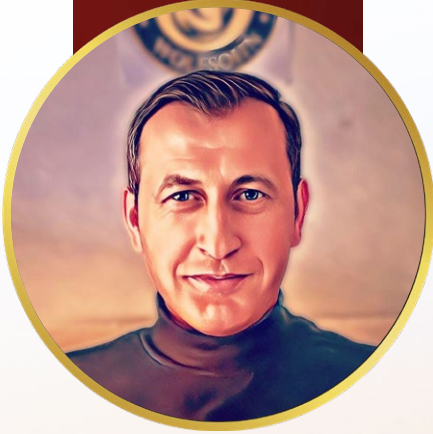
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# Two Robots in Ukraine:

## What “Humanoids on the Battlefield” Actually Means in 2026

A humanoid robot has been deployed to an active war zone. It carried supplies, could not swim, ran out of battery, and fell over during a press visit. Meanwhile Ukraine contracted 22,000 ground robots that look nothing like people. The gap between those two facts is the whole story.

In February 2026, a San Francisco startup called Foundation shipped two Phantom MK-1 humanoid robots to Ukraine. TIME reported it in March. It appears to be the first time a bipedal, human-shaped robot has been sent to an active front line anywhere in the world.

That is a genuine milestone, and it deserves to be reported as one. It is also, on the evidence available, close to the least militarily significant robotics story of the year.

In the same period, Ukraine contracted more than 22,000 unmanned ground vehicles — wheeled and tracked machines that carry ammunition, evacuate casualties, and conduct reconnaissance. In March alone, Ukrainian forces ran over 9,000 UGV missions. President Zelenskyy has ordered at least 50,000 fielded during 2026.

Two humanoids. Twenty-two thousand not-humanoids. Both are robots on the battlefield. Only one is winning a war. This article is about why the headline version of this story keeps getting the emphasis backwards.

### WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED

The device. Foundation unveiled the Phantom MK-1 in October 2025, describing it as a humanoid robot built specifically for military use. It stands roughly 175cm (5'9") and weighs 79–82kg. Reported unit cost is around \$150,000. Foundation's co-founder Mike LeBlanc is a former US Marine with 14 years of service and deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan; CEO Sanket Pathak previously led the fintech platform Synapse, which went bankrupt in 2024 — a detail several outlets noted and none dwelt on.

The deployment. Two units arrived in Ukraine in February 2026. Testing was conducted with Ukrainian officials and supported by the US government. The robots were used primarily for logistics in hazardous areas — delivering ammunition and supplies to positions under fire — and some reconnaissance. They were not authorised to use lethal force autonomously, and reporting indicates they did not carry weapons in the field.

The results were mixed, and Foundation said so. Pathak told CNBC the trials showed the platform's potential for logistics tasks. He also acknowledged the MK-1 is nowhere near a “super soldier.” The documented limitations:

- Payload capacity of roughly 20kg
- Not waterproof



- Battery endurance insufficient for sustained operations
- Balance problems — during TIME's visit to the company, one Phantom fell over with a loud crash several times

Ukrainian engineers and soldiers raised additional concerns that go beyond hardware: technology loss if a unit is captured, exposing sensitive algorithms; vulnerability to electronic warfare, including jamming and spoofing of control links; and AI unpredictability — the possibility of a model hallucinating or deviating from programmed behaviour under real combat conditions.

The commercial context. Foundation holds roughly \$24 million in US Army, Navy, and Air Force research contracts covering inspection, logistics, and weapons-related tasks. Pathak has said conversations with officials have moved from research toward scaling, and aims to field the technology with the US military — and in front-line conflict zones if required — within 12 to 18 months. A Phantom MK-2 with hardened electronics, waterproofing, larger batteries, and up to 80kg payload was slated for April 2026, with delivery to Ukraine expected around the end of the year.

Foundation's stated long-term goal is a robot able to use any weapon a human can. LeBlanc has argued humanoids could be invaluable for resupply and for reconnaissance in places drones cannot reach — bunkers, basements — and noted that a human-like heat signature could confuse an enemy.

Pathak's framing of why Ukraine: "Just like drones, machine guns, or any technology, you first have to get them into the hands of customers."

Ukraine is the customer. The war is the test environment.

## THE COMPARISON THAT REFRAMES EVERYTHING

Set the two Phantoms against what is actually happening on the same front.

Scale. Ukraine's Defence Procurement Agency had contracted over 22,000 UGVs for 2026 by mid-year — nearly double all of 2025 — with more planned. All domestically manufactured. The overwhelming majority are logistics systems, followed by engineering platforms, then combat systems. Since January, 67 new UGV models have

been codified for operational use.

Tempo. Over 7,000 ground robot missions were logged in a single month in early 2026. Zelenskyy stated in April that more than 22,000 unmanned missions had run in the previous three months.

Industrial base. Brave1, Ukraine's defence-tech cluster, contains roughly 300 ground-drone companies, up from zero in 2022, with 175 grants issued. Ukraine's UGV market grew 488% in 2025. Since January, the Defence Ministry has spent over 14 billion hryvnia (~\$330 million) pushing more than 181,000 drones, UGVs and electronic warfare systems to the front.

Proof of concept. Zelenskyy described an operation in which the NC13 robotic strike unit of the 3rd Separate Assault Brigade took a fortified Russian position in Kharkiv Oblast using only aerial drones and UGVs — the first time in the war a position was captured exclusively by unmanned platforms. Russian troops eventually raised a cardboard sign reading "We want to surrender" and were guided into captivity by drones.

None of those machines were humanoid. They were wheeled and tracked platforms with no legs, no arms, no head, and no attempt at a human silhouette.

This is the central point. The robotic transformation of ground warfare is already well advanced. It simply has not taken a human shape, because the human shape is not what the tasks require.

## WHY LEGS ARE A HARD SELL

There is a serious argument for humanoids, and it deserves stating properly.

Kateryna Bondar of CSIS's Wadhvani AI Center made the strongest version: modern urban combat spaces — stairwells, ladders, basements, narrow corridors — were built for human movement, which could give humanoid systems an advantage over tracked or wheeled robots in specific scenarios. A machine shaped like a person can use infrastructure designed for people: doors, handles, ladders, vehicles, and in principle the same weapons and equipment as infantry.

That is a real argument. It is also, so far, a theoretical one, and the counter-arguments are currently winning:

Cost. A Phantom runs around \$150,000. Ukrainian UGVs are dramatically cheaper, and FPV drones cost hundreds of dollars. In attritional warfare, cost per unit



is not a detail — it determines whether you can afford to lose the machine, which is the entire point of sending a machine.

Complexity. Bipedal locomotion is one of the hardest problems in robotics. Every joint is a failure point. Wheels and tracks solve movement with a fraction of the engineering.

Bondar's own caveat, alongside her supportive point, concerned the complexity and cost of manufacturing humanoids relative to alternatives.

And the missions being run don't need hands. The dominant UGV tasks in Ukraine are logistics, casualty evacuation, and reconnaissance. Carrying ammunition to a position does not require opposable thumbs. It requires load capacity, range, and a low enough price to be expendable.

A defence-industry assessment of the current state put it plainly: as of 2026, no fully humanoid robot has been deployed in direct combat operations. Non-humanoid systems — UGVs, quadrupeds, EOD robots — are actively used in combat zones. The Phantom is the closest humanoid platform to deployment, with contracts secured and field testing underway.

### **WHAT CHINA IS DOING, AND WHY IT ISN'T HUMANOIDS EITHER**

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China is frequently invoked as the humanoid-military threat. The evidence points somewhere more specific and more immediate.

Quadrupeds, not bipeds. Chinese state media has shown armed robot dogs — including Uni-

tree Go2 platforms with mounted firearms — in PLA exercises, urban combat simulations, breach-and-clear drills, and airdropped onto rooftops from multi-rotor drones. In November 2024 the PLA issued a tender for AI-powered robot dogs to scout in packs and clear explosive hazards.

Purpose-built military variants exist. Firms including Deep Robotics and others are reportedly building military quadrupeds with rifles, grenade launchers, and autonomous targeting at unit costs below \$30,000. At the World Defense Show in Riyadh in February 2026, a





Chinese state-linked manufacturer displayed the PF-070, a quadruped carrying four anti-tank guided missiles — presented as production-ready and positioned for export. The price comparison is the story. Boston Dynamics' Spot costs \$74,500 and the company has pledged never to weaponise it. Chinese military quadrupeds reportedly cost around \$30,000 and arrive armed. Unitree's commercial platforms start well under \$3,000. Unitree publicly disavows weaponisation while, per multiple investigations, maintaining links to the PLA through military-affiliated universities under China's military-civil fusion strategy.

Humanoids are a support technology in Chinese thinking, for now. Industry analysis of Chinese military humanoid experimentation identifies the likely near-term roles as logistics, inspection, maintenance support, hazardous area entry, infrastructure assessment, and emergency response — not frontline combat. As one analyst noted, there is still a great deal to learn about how these robots behave in battlefield situations, much of which is difficult to recreate in testing.

The competitive risk from China is not a humanoid army. It is cheap, exportable, armed autonomous ground systems reaching a global arms market — the same trajectory Turkey and Israel followed in drones.

## THE LEGAL VACUUM

This is the part that should worry people most, and it gets the least coverage.

There is no binding international treaty governing lethal autonomous weapons systems. The UN passed a non-binding LAWS resolution in December 2024. That is the extent of the framework.

US policy holds that the final decision on the use of force must rest with a human. Chinese defence officials have publicly committed to maintaining human control over weapons systems. Both positions are policy, not law, and policy can change.

The pressure on that principle is structural rather than ideological. When both sides field autonomous systems, engagement tempo may exceed human decision-making speed — robot-versus-robot exchanges unfolding in seconds, too fast for a commander to intervene. That creates pressure to grant machines more autonomy, pushing against human-in-the-loop in ways that may prove very difficult to resist once an adversary moves first.

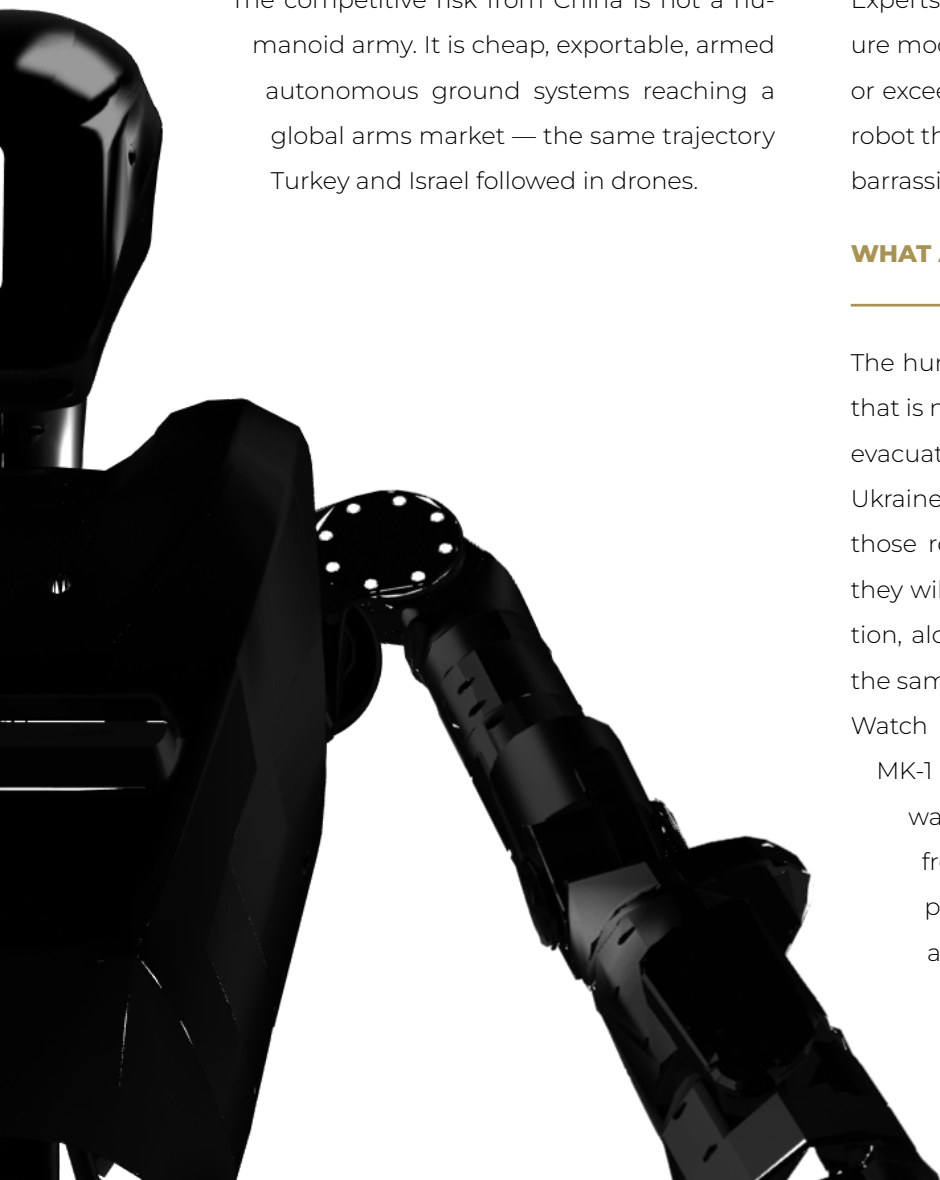
Experts cited by TIME flagged the more mundane failure modes: AI systems that make mistakes, exhibit bias, or exceed their constraints in complex environments. A robot that falls over during a press demonstration is embarrassing. A robot that misidentifies a target is not.

## WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS NEXT

The humanoid's near-term military role is logistics, and that is not a small thing. Frontline resupply and casualty evacuation are among the deadliest tasks in warfare. Ukraine's entire UGV push exists to move soldiers out of those roles. If humanoids eventually contribute there, they will save lives — unglamorously, in a support function, alongside thousands of wheeled machines doing the same job more cheaply.

Watch the MK-2 results, not the MK-1 headlines. The MK-1 established that a humanoid can be sent to a war zone. Whether it should be depends on data from a hardened platform — waterproofing, 80kg payload, better batteries — expected in Ukraine around late 2026. That is the first test that will mean anything.

Ukraine's role as proving ground is the durable development. For any de-





fence startup validating autonomous systems, Ukraine has become the place where products either work or don't, and soldiers say so immediately. Ukraine is reportedly planning a grant competition for military humanoid development. This feedback loop — combat data flowing directly into product iteration — is reshaping defence procurement more than any individual platform. The proliferation problem is quadrupeds, not humanoids. Armed autonomous ground systems at \$30,000 a unit, offered for export at international arms shows, put precise ground lethality within reach of any reasonably funded state or non-state actor. That is happening now, in production, at scale — while the humanoid conversation remains about prototypes.

And the form factor may simply lose. There is a real possibility that humanoid military robots turn out to be a solution in search of a problem — that the tasks worth automating are better served by machines optimised for those tasks rather than machines shaped like the operators they replace. Seven years of foldable phones offer a cautionary parallel: an impressive engineering achievement is not automatically a product anyone needs.

## THE HONEST SUMMARY

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Humanoid robots are on the battlefield. Two of them. They carried supplies, could not get wet, ran short of power, and fell over on camera. Their manufacturer, to its credit, has been fairly candid about all of it.

The robotic transformation of ground combat is real, advanced, and accelerating — and it is being carried out overwhelmingly by machines that look nothing like people, because in almost every current mission the human shape is a liability rather than an advantage.

The headline writes itself as science fiction arriving. The more accurate framing is that a hard technical problem has produced its first field trial, alongside a much larger robotics revolution that has been underway for four years and produces far fewer arresting images.

Which of those two stories gets attention tells you more about media incentives than about warfare. But if you want to know what is actually changing on the ground in Ukraine right now, count the wheels, not the legs. ■



HEIGHT  
**5'-11"**  
[1.8m]

WEIGHT  
**176lbs**  
[80kg]

PAYLOAD CAPACITY  
**88.2lbs**  
[40kg]



DEGREES OF  
FREEDOM  
**19°**

SPEED  
**1.7 m/s**

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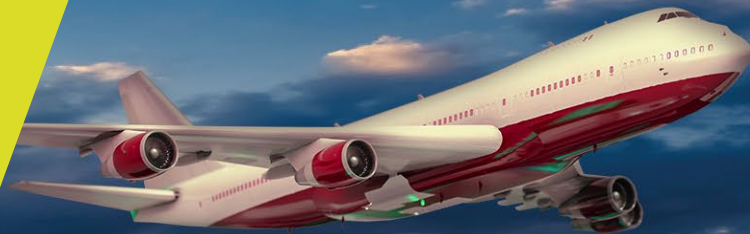
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# The Satellite Phone Isn't Coming

It's Already in Your Pocket. So Why Doesn't It Feel That Way?

Roughly 60 phone models can now reach a satellite without any accessory. The largest cellular network on Earth by coverage area is in orbit. Most people who own the capability have no idea, and there are good technical reasons why it still feels like a rumour rather than a feature.

For thirty years the satellite phone was a specific object: a brick with a thick antenna, sold to journalists, oil crews, and expedition teams, priced beyond ordinary reach and useless in a city.

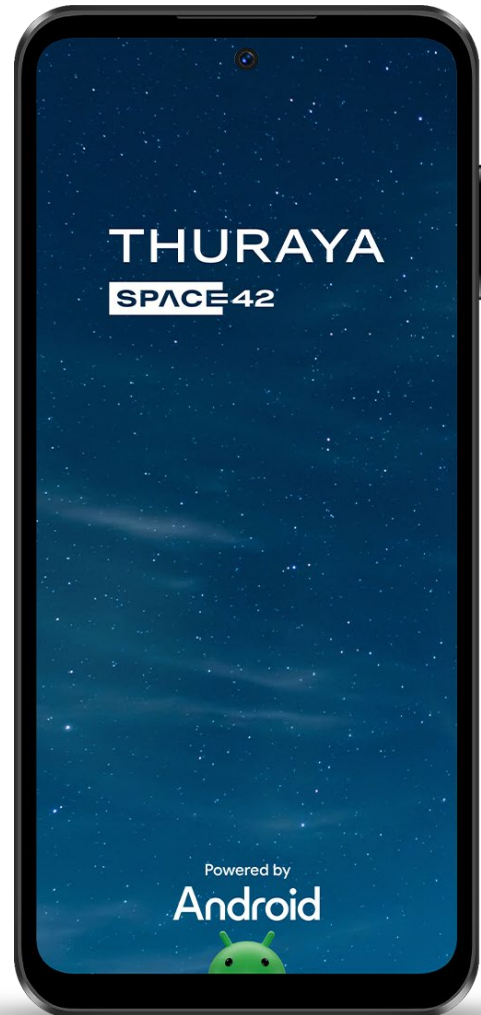
That object has quietly ceased to matter. The satellite phone is not a product category any more. It is a capability that has been folded into ordinary handsets while nobody was paying attention — no accessory, no separate SIM, no different device. If you bought a flagship phone in the last two or three years, you probably own it. The interesting question in mid-2026 is not whether this is coming. It has arrived. The question is why a technology that genuinely works still feels invisible to the people carrying it, and what the gap between “it exists” and “it’s useful” actually consists of.

## WHERE THINGS ACTUALLY STAND

Three distinct systems now put satellite connectivity into normal phones, and they work differently enough that conflating them causes most of the public confusion.

### 1. Starlink Direct to Cell: the volume play

SpaceX has launched more than 650 Direct-to-Cell



satellites, orbiting at roughly 530–550 km. These function as cell towers in space, picking up standard LTE signals from unmodified handsets. No special SIM, no hardware, no app — when a phone loses terrestrial coverage, it searches for a satellite automatically.

As of 2026 the service is live in 22 countries. In the US it runs as T-Mobile’s T-Satellite; elsewhere through Rogers in Canada, Optus in Australia, KDDI and NTT Docomo in Japan, Virgin Media O2 in the UK, plus Chile and Peru. Spain is set to be the first EU market via MasOrange. Roughly 60 phone models are compatible, spanning recent Samsung, Apple, and Motorola devices.

The commercial momentum is the part that surprises people. More than 18,000 new users connect daily. Starlink signed its largest direct-to-cell agreement yet with







Veon — access to over 150 million potential customers across Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan. Airtel Africa signed for Starlink D2C across 14 African markets covering 174 million customers, launching in 2026 subject to national regulatory approval.

In January 2026 the FCC authorised SpaceX to deploy an additional 7,500 Gen2 satellites, bringing total approved constellation size to 15,000 — not all D2C-equipped, but the headroom is there. Pricing in the US has settled around a \$10 monthly add-on.

By coverage area, this is already the largest cellular network on the planet. Most people just don't know it.

## **2. Apple and Globalstar: the closed system that got bought**

Apple took a different route, and its situation just changed materially.

Since the iPhone 14 in late 2022, Apple has run satellite features through Globalstar using dedicated hardware and spectrum rather than standard LTE bands. What began as Emergency SOS has expanded into a genuine off-grid toolkit: Emergency SOS, Messages via satellite (end-to-end encrypted, through the normal Messages app), Find My location sharing, and Roadside Assistance. Support extends to iPhone 14 and later, and to the Apple Watch Ultra 3. Apple has invested around \$450 million in Globalstar's infrastructure and extended free access for iPhone 14 and 15 owners through November 2026 — the third such extension, and a fairly clear signal that a paid tier is being contemplated but not yet triggered.

Then in April 2026, Amazon agreed to acquire Globalstar. Apple held roughly 20% of the company. Alongside the acquisition, Amazon and Apple signed a separate agreement for Amazon's Leo network to power existing and future iPhone and Apple Watch satellite features. The transaction is expected to close in 2027.

This is the most consequential development in the sector this year and has attracted less attention than it deserves. Apple's satellite capability now depends on infrastructure owned by Amazon. Reported forthcoming features — Apple Maps via satellite, photos in satellite Messages, indoor connectivity, satellite over 5G, and a satellite API for third-party apps — reportedly require infrastructure upgrades. Separately, Apple's C2 modem, expected in the iPhone 18 Pro line this autumn, is reported to add 5G-over-satellite support.

Whether two companies with as much strategic friction as Apple and Amazon can run a decade-long infrastructure dependency smoothly is an open question. It is not obviously a comfortable arrangement for either.

## **3. AST SpaceMobile: the ambitious one that keeps slipping**

AST is attempting something harder than either: real broadband from orbit, not messaging.

Its BlueBird satellites unfurl phased-array antennas of roughly 64 square metres — BlueBird 6, launched December 2025, carries nearly 2,400 square feet of array, a 3.5x increase over the first generation with ten times the data capacity. The company has





demonstrated 98.9 Mbps peak speeds using an in-orbit Block 1 satellite over international waters, and expects next-generation units to substantially exceed 120 Mbps.

The backing is serious: strategic partnerships with AT&T, Verizon, Vodafone, Rakuten, Google, American Tower, Bell, and stc Group; agreements with over 50

mobile operators covering nearly 3 billion subscribers; over \$1.2 billion in contracted revenue commitments; and more than \$3.9 billion in cash and liquidity as of end-2025. In April 2026 the FCC authorised a 248-satellite constellation and granted Supplemental Coverage from Space authority for commercial direct-to-device broadband in the US.



And it is behind schedule. The company targeted 45–60 satellites in orbit by end-2026. As of July 2026 it has launched 10. BlueBird 7 was lost after an off-nominal upper-stage burn on a Blue Origin New Glenn flight; a late-June ground-test anomaly then produced an upper-stage explosion that sidelined New Glenn entirely. AST pivoted to SpaceX Falcon 9 — launching BlueBirds 8, 9, and 10 in June — and in a July 15, 2026 SEC filing disclosed that commercial service has moved from late 2026 to early 2027, alongside a plan to raise up to \$1 billion and language about possible vertical integration into launch to reduce dependence on third-party providers.

Analyst Tim Farrar of TMF Associates had been publicly sceptical of AST's targets for some time, citing a history of missed deadlines.

There is an irony worth noting: the most credible challenger to Starlink is now dependent on SpaceX rockets to deploy the constellation meant to compete with it.

## WHY IT STILL DOESN'T FEEL REAL

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The technology works. The reason it feels like vapourware to most owners comes down to three things.

### 4. The capability tiers get exponentially harder.

The rollout sequence — SMS first, then data, then voice — is deliberate, not arbitrary. Text messages are short bursts that tolerate a few seconds of delay. Voice and real-time data need sustained, low-latency connections through a satellite crossing the sky in roughly four minutes, with handoffs to the next one.

The gap between “SMS works” (2025) and “voice and data indistinguishable from cellular” (targeted for late 2027) illustrates how much harder each successive tier is. Anyone expecting satellite to behave like a cell tower on day one has misjudged the problem.

### 5. The bandwidth ceiling is a standards issue, not just a satellite issue.

3GPP Release 17 — the first with normative non-terrestrial network specifications — supports narrowband NTN up to around 400 Kbps. Adequate for messaging and, in principle, voice. Nowhere near broadband.

Anything above roughly 10 Mbps requires Release 18-compliant devices and upgraded satellite hardware. Release 19 was frozen in December 2025, adding regenerative payload architectures and RedCap device sup-

port, with ecosystem maturity expected through 2026–27. Release 20's 6G study work began at the end of 2025. This matters because it means the constraint is not purely how many satellites are up. It is also which standard your handset's modem implements — and that is fixed at manufacture. Buying a phone today locks in a satellite capability ceiling you cannot upgrade.

### 6. Spectrum is borrowed, and regulators grant it market by market.

Direct-to-device services largely operate on spectrum licensed to terrestrial carriers, not satellite operators. Making a satellite transmit on frequencies allocated to cell towers — even where no tower exists — requires national regulatory coordination in every jurisdiction. Licences carry strict power-flux-density conditions and obligations to cease operation immediately if interference is detected.

This is why coverage maps look patchy in ways that have nothing to do with orbital mechanics. A satellite passing over a country cannot legally serve it without local approval. The FCC also rejected a SpaceX spectrum application in April 2026, constraining capability expansion.

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

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Europe arrives late but at scale. Five major operator groups — CK Hutchison, Orange, Sunrise, Telefónica, and Vodafone — have agreed to deploy D2D satellite mobile broadband across Europe, with customer trials from summer 2026 and launch targeted around the end of the year.

The revenue case is modest at first, large later. Analysys Mason expects operators launching D2D in 2026 to see roughly a 1% annual revenue uplift from basic services, with substantially more upside once broadband D2D matures. That is a rounding error on a carrier P&L — which tells you the near-term driver is competitive positioning and churn reduction, not new revenue. Coverage becomes a marketing claim before it becomes a business.

The category dissolves. The quiet structural shift is that “satellite connectivity” stops being a distinct product. Because NTN is standardised within 3GPP, satellite-capable devices need no separate chipsets — the same 5G protocols, adapted, with the modem handling timing advance, Doppler pre-compensation, and



ephemeris tracking invisibly. A developer building an NTN-capable device in 2026 writes substantially the same application they would have written for terrestrial LTE.

The endpoint is that nobody says “satellite phone” because every phone is one, and the connection type stops being something users think about — the same way nobody checks whether they’re on 4G or 5G before sending a message.

Dead zones stop being a design assumption. For fifteen years, product design assumed intermittent connectivity was normal outside cities. Offline modes, sync queues, cached maps — an entire engineering practice built around the coverage gap. As that gap closes, the assumption changes: not “will there be signal” but “how much signal, at what cost.” That is a different design problem, and most software has not caught up.

Consolidation is already happening. Amazon buying Globalstar, SpaceX acquiring EchoStar spectrum previ-

ously held by Boost Mobile, AST contemplating vertical integration into launch, SpaceX trademarking “Starlink Mobile” in late 2025 — these are the moves of an industry positioning for a market that will support two or three winners, not ten.

### THE HONEST CAVEATS

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Battery. Reaching a satellite requires transmitting at higher power than reaching a nearby tower. The drain is comparable to being in a weak-signal area with the radio boosting to find a distant tower — noticeable, not catastrophic, but real when off-grid is precisely where charging is hardest.

Sky view. You need a clear view upward. Dense forest canopy, narrow canyons, and indoor environments still defeat these systems today. Indoor satellite connectivity appears on Apple’s reported roadmap, which tells you it does not work now.





Compatibility is narrower than the marketing. Starlink and T-Mobile say the service works with most modern LTE phones and that they are optimising older models — but the actual supported list runs to around 60 devices. “Most modern phones” and “the phone you own” are not the same claim.

Timelines have a pattern. AST’s slip from late 2026 to early 2027 is the second material delay in its public schedule, and it follows a rocket failure and a launch-vehicle grounding — genuinely outside the company’s control, which is rather the point. Constellation deployment depends on launch availability, and launch availability is concentrated in very few providers. Every projection in this article should be read with that in mind.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

The satellite phone did not arrive as a product launch. It arrived as a firmware update, a carrier add-on, and a line item in a spec sheet nobody read.

Right now the honest status is this: texting from anywhere works, in a growing number of countries, on a specific list of phones. Voice and real-world data are arriving in stages through 2027. True broadband from orbit — the thing that would genuinely make coverage maps obsolete — depends on constellations that are behind schedule and standards that require hardware most people have not bought yet.

That is much further along than most phone owners realise, and considerably less finished than the marketing implies. Both things are true, which is usually the case with infrastructure. The interesting part is that the last time a communications capability went from exotic to invisible this quickly, it was GPS — also military, also expensive, also a separate device, and now something nobody thinks about at all.

Satellite connectivity is somewhere in the middle of that same journey. Worth checking whether the phone in your pocket already does it. ■

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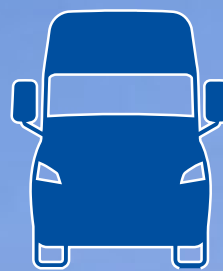




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# The AI Tax on Your Next Phone:

## How Memory Costs Are Reshaping Smartphone Pricing

Memory now accounts for more than 65% of what it costs to build a cheap phone. That single number explains the disappearance of the budget tier, the worst annual shipment decline in smartphone history, and why the industry's own suppliers say relief is years away.

There is a number that explains almost everything happening to phone prices right now, and it comes from IDC's senior research director for consumer devices, Nabila Popal, describing the second quarter of 2026:

Memory costs are up nearly 300% year over year, and now account for over 65% of the bill of materials at the low end.

Sit with that. On a budget smartphone, two-thirds of the manufacturing cost is now the memory chips alone — before the processor, the screen, the camera, the battery, the casing, the assembly, the shipping, the marketing, or anyone's profit. A category of device that survived on thin margins and high volume has had its cost structure inverted by a component that used to be an afterthought. This is not a shortage in the conventional sense. Nobody bombed a factory. The chips are being manufactured in enormous quantities. They are simply going somewhere else.

### THE MECHANISM: WHY AI ATE THE MEMORY

The smartphone in your pocket and the servers running AI models draw from the same finite pool

of wafer capacity, controlled by three companies: Samsung, SK Hynix, and Micron.

Those companies face a straightforward commercial choice. High-bandwidth memory (HBM) for AI accelerators commands vastly better margins than the LPDDR chips that go into phones. Cloud providers are signing multi-quarter and multi-year purchasing agreements, locking in volume years ahead. Phone makers buy on shorter cycles, at lower prices, for a market that is shrinking.

Given that choice, the manufacturers have reallocated production lines toward HBM, server DRAM, and enterprise SSDs. Consumer memory gets whatever capacity is left.

Counterpoint's Tarun Pathak described the resulting dynamic without diplomatic softening: memory companies are asking smartphone vendors to stand in line behind the hyperscalers, with allocation to phone makers deprioritized in favour of AI.

That is the entire story. Everything below is consequence.

### THE NUMBERS GOT MUCH WORSE IN 2026

This crisis has accelerated sharply, and figures from early 2026 badly understate where things now stand.

Contract prices are moving at rates the industry has not seen in decades. TrendForce's Q2 2026 data shows LPDDR5X average selling prices rising 78–83% quarter over quarter, with LPDDR4X up 70–75% in the same three months. These follow several consecutive quarters of steep increases — they compound on top of already-elevated Q1 levels rather than recovering from them.

Broader contract pricing tells the same story: conventional DRAM up 58–63% QoQ in Q2, NAND flash up 70–75%. Storage is arguably worse than RAM. Per SigmaIntel, 256GB UFS 3.1 — the storage standard in mid-range phones — more than doubled in Q2, rising 103% to \$62.7. uMCP packages rose 107% to \$150.4. For context on the raw material: LPDDR5 contract prices around \$10/GB were projected to approach \$20/GB by the end of Q2.







Splitting by vendor camp, Q2 DRAM pricing rose roughly 80–90% QoQ for both Apple and Android suppliers, while NAND rose 70–80% for Apple and 90–100% for the Android camp — the manufacturers with the least pricing power paying the steepest increases.

And the demand side has broken. Global smartphone shipments in Q2 2026 hit the lowest second-quarter level since 2013.

Three firms measured the quarter differently, which is worth noting rather than papering over: Counterpoint recorded an 11% year-over-year decline; IDC put absolute volume at 277.5 million units, down 6.7%; Omdia measured roughly 4% using different definitions. The methodologies differ; the direction does not.

For the full year, Counterpoint forecasts a 13.9% decline to around 1.08 billion units — which would be the worst annual contraction in the history of the smartphone industry. IDC projects a comparable 13.9% fall to roughly 1.09 billion.

### THE MARKET HAS SPLIT IN TWO

The most important structural development is that this crisis is not hitting everyone. It is actively redistributing the market.

IDC's Francisco Jeronimo put it directly: the memory crisis has split the smartphone market in two. At the top, Apple and Samsung are pulling away because they secured supply early and sell into segments where memory is a smaller share of the bill of materials. At the bottom, vendors exposed to cheap high-volume devices are absorbing the pain — and passing it to their customers. It is, in his framing, a crisis that rewards scale, supply relationships, and a premium mix.

The Q2 scoreboard bears it out. Samsung and Apple were the only two vendors in the global top five to post growth, for the second consecutive quarter, lifting share by 3.2 and 3.8 percentage points respectively. Counterpoint put Samsung at 24% share and Apple at 20%. IDC recorded Samsung growing shipments 8.1% year over year to 22.6% share, with Apple on track for roughly 22% annual share as buyers pulled purchases forward ahead of expected price rises.

Everyone else contracted. Xiaomi fell to 12% share on Counterpoint's numbers — and by IDC's measure dropped 26.3%, having deliberately cut low-end volume to protect margins. OPPO and vivo both declined. Earlier 2026 figures showed the budget-exposed brands taking the worst of it: Transsion down 32%, Xiaomi down 28%, Honor down 20%.

There is a bitter logic here. The companies that built their businesses on making phones affordable are being destroyed by an input cost they cannot pass on, while the companies selling \$1,200 devices are gaining share. The memory crisis is, functionally, a wealth transfer from the low end of the market to the high end.

### WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS TO THE PHONE YOU BUY

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Three mechanisms are operating simultaneously, and only one is visible on a price tag.

1. Prices rise. Global wholesale smartphone prices rose 14% in Q1 2026 alone. In several emerging markets,

IDC has observed retail prices rising 40–50% — catastrophic in regions where a phone already represents a substantial share of monthly income.

2. Specifications quietly regress. TrendForce documents the reconfiguration in progress: in the high end, 12GB is becoming mainstream while 16GB adoption declines. Mid-range devices are reverting to 8GB. Entry-level models are settling around 4GB. The average phone's DRAM content still rises to 8.5GB in 2026 — but largely because the cheapest, lowest-spec devices are being discontinued rather than because anyone is getting more memory. This is the least honest part of the crisis. A phone that





costs the same as last year's but ships with less RAM is a price increase that never appears in any pricing index.

3. Entire price tiers vanish. The sub-\$100 segment is collapsing. Models priced below \$150 are expected to disappear as pre-shock inventory runs out. Popal's assessment is blunt: the era of ultra-cheap smartphones is over, and only vendors that adapt to the new cost environment will survive.

For a device that has become the primary — often only — computing device for billions of people, the disappearance of the sub-\$150 tier is a genuine development in global digital access, not a consumer-electronics footnote.



## WHY THIS WILL NOT RESOLVE QUICKLY

The intuitive response is that high prices attract investment, capacity expands, and prices fall. That is normally how memory works. This cycle appears different in ways worth spelling out.

The money has been committed. Samsung and SK Hynix announced plans to invest roughly 1,350 trillion won (~\$870 billion) over ten years across memory, storage, logic, and data centers. Micron has announced a \$200 billion long-term US programme spanning Idaho, New York, and Virginia. The capital is not the constraint.

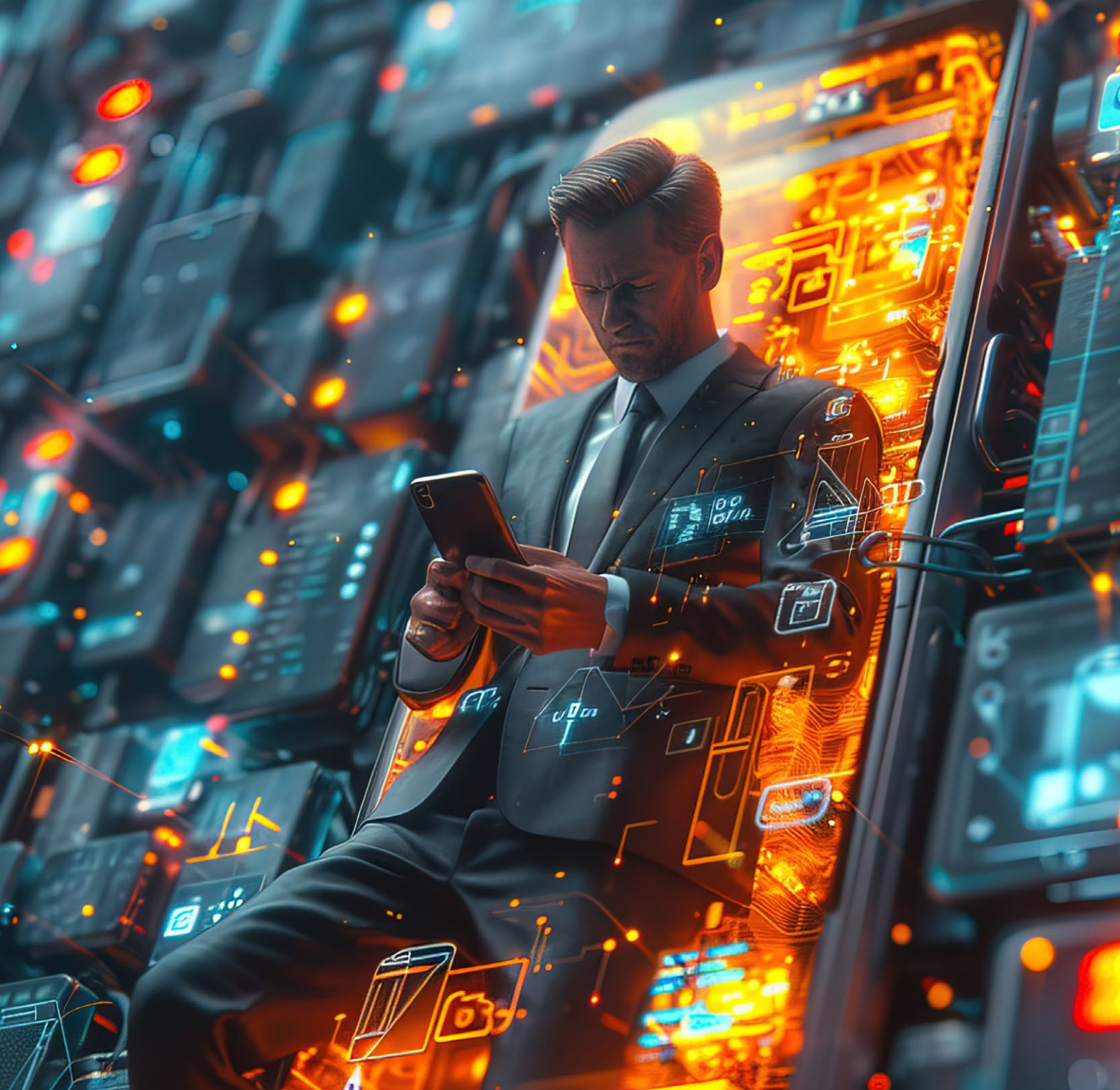
Physics is the constraint. Bank of America's June 2026 analysis found that even nearly doubling Korean DRAM wafer capacity by 2030 implies about 15% annual growth on paper — but after accounting for older fab closures and the longer cycle times new memory products require, actual running wafer capacity expansion will stay below 10% annually, with net growth at a single-digit compound rate through 2030. Industry body Semi projects global DRAM capacity growing at an average of just 4.8% annually through 2030.

The timelines are brutal. Micron's Idaho fab does not begin DRAM production until mid-2027; its New York fabs broke ground only in January 2026 and may not reach full production until 2030. Samsung's Pyeongtaek fab is due in 2028. SK Hynix's Indiana facility targets late 2028 — and is focused on HBM packaging, not phone memory. Supply-chain sources suggest SK Hynix may install only one-sixth of its originally planned incremental capacity by 2028, with foundations alone at the new Gwangju and Jeolla sites taking around five years, plus three to four more for clean rooms and equipment. SK Hynix's own chairman noted it took nine years to build up the company's existing manufacturing base in Gyeonggi Province.

Demand is growing into the new capacity. This is the point most coverage misses. Even doubled DRAM capacity may simply keep pace with AI data center demand rather than create surplus for consumers. Micron is currently meeting only 50% to two-thirds of core customer demand. SK Hynix's internal projections reportedly see the DRAM market not stabilising before 2028.

And prices may not return to where they were. Multiple analysts now project that even post-shortage normalisation will not restore consumer DRAM prices





to 2025 levels. The counter-argument deserves airing: memory is historically cyclical, high prices reliably induce overbuilding, and the bullwhip effect has produced gluts before — so 2028–29 could see prices fall further than anyone currently expects. That view is genuinely held by serious observers. It simply requires waiting two more years to find out.

#### WHAT THIS MEANS BEYOND 2026

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Phone replacement cycles will lengthen structurally. When the price of a new mid-range device rises

15–25% while wages do not, people keep phones longer. That reduces unit volumes permanently, not just during the shortage, because a longer replacement cycle established over three difficult years does not automatically snap back.

The refurbished market becomes strategically important. Certified refurbished devices from 2024 and early 2025 were built with pre-shock memory contracts. They represent hardware specifications that are, in some configurations, no longer economically manufacturable at their original price point. That is an unusual situation: a used device that is genuinely better value than anything



new in its class, not marginally but structurally. Expect refurb volumes and refurb pricing to rise together.

Digital inclusion goes into reverse. For fifteen years, the cheapest smartphone got cheaper and more capable every year, which is the mechanism that put internet access in the hands of several billion people. That mechanism has stopped and reversed. A market where the entry price rises 40–50% in emerging economies is a market where some people simply do not get connected. This may prove the most consequential long-term effect, and it is the one receiving the least attention.

Consolidation at the low end is close to inevitable. Brands with thin margins and heavy budget-tier exposure face a choice between merging, exiting markets, or moving upmarket into segments where they lack brand permission. Xiaomi's decision to cut low-end volume deliberately to protect margins is a preview: the rational move is retreat.

The industry becomes AI's downstream cost centre. Perhaps the strangest consequence is structural. Smartphone economics are now substantially determined by decisions made in AI capital expenditure planning — a market phone makers do not participate in and cannot influence. When a hyperscaler expands its cluster, the marginal effect is a more expensive phone in Lagos

or Jakarta. That transmission mechanism did not exist three years ago, and there is no obvious reason it will weaken.

## THE UNCOMFORTABLE SUMMARY

There is no villain here, which is part of what makes it intractable. Memory manufacturers allocating capacity to their highest-margin customers are behaving exactly as firms are supposed to. AI companies buying all available HBM are doing the same. Phone makers raising prices are passing through a real cost increase, not profiteering. The outcome is nonetheless that a global infrastructure boom is being partially financed by people buying cheap phones — through higher prices, reduced specifications, and in some cases the disappearance of any product they can afford. They did not consent to this, receive nothing from it, and in most cases have no idea it is happening.

If you need a phone and your current one is failing, the analyst consensus is unusually uniform: buy now. Prices are rising through 2026, the budget tier is shrinking, and the earliest credible relief is late 2027 — with 2028 the more realistic estimate, and no guarantee prices return to where they started. ■

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- SOURCES 10, 12, 13, AND 14 ARE TRADE AND VENDOR-ADJACENT PUBLICATIONS; THEIR FIGURES ARE USED WHERE THEY CORROBORATE THE PRIMARY TRACKERS. SOURCE 22 IS A FORUM DISCUSSION, CITED ONLY FOR THE CONTRARIAN GLUT ARGUMENT, WHICH IS ATTRIBUTED AS A VIEW RATHER THAN A FINDING.
- FORWARD-LOOKING CLAIMS ABOUT 2027–2030 PRICING ARE PROJECTIONS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM MANUFACTURERS WITH A COMMERCIAL INTEREST IN EXPECTATIONS OF CONTINUED SCARCITY. THEY SHOULD BE READ ACCORDINGLY.



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# The Channel That Broke:

How Egypt Dismantled Its Mobile Distribution Trade — And What Replaced It

Between 2021 and 2026, Egypt's phone import bill fell by more than 99%, four-fifths of the market was declared illegal, and the country went from importing almost everything to building 15 million handsets a year. The distributors who survived are not running the businesses they started with.

For most of the last two decades, the economics of moving Samsung handsets in Egypt were simple enough to fit on a napkin. Import in dollars, sell in pounds, hold stock, take a margin on volume. The distributor's core assets were an import licence, working capital, warehouse space, and relationships with several thousand small retailers.

Every one of those assets has been devalued or made obsolete since 2021 — not by a competitor, but by the Egyptian state.

What follows is a documented account of what happened to Egypt's mobile distribution channel, assembled from public reporting. It is worth being clear about what this article is and is not: there is no public record of a single named Samsung distributor in Egypt collapsing and being resurrected. What the record does show is a

channel-wide near-death event and a structural rebuild that changed who makes money and how. The individual company stories inside that shift have largely gone unreported — a gap worth noting rather than filling with speculation.

## PART ONE: THE FALL

### 1. The currency stopped working

The first blow was macroeconomic and had nothing to do with phones.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 exposed Egypt's dependence on food and fuel imports. Investors doubted the central bank's ability to defend the managed exchange rate, producing a portfolio outflow of roughly \$20 billion between January and September 2022. For-





foreign reserves fell to little more than three months of import cover by July 2022, down from 6.8 months a year earlier.

The devaluations followed in sequence. January 2023 brought the third, costing the pound roughly 40% of its value — official rates reaching 31 EGP to the dollar while parallel markets approached 40. In March 2024 the currency was floated outright, valuing the pound at roughly two US cents. Across the period the pound lost approximately half its value against the dollar within a single year. For an importer, a devaluation of that magnitude is not a margin problem. It is a solvency problem. Stock purchased in dollars at one rate is sold in pounds at another, and if the gap opens faster than inventory turns, the business is destroyed by arithmetic rather than by any commercial mistake.

## 2. Then the dollars themselves disappeared

Worse than the exchange rate was the inability to transact at any rate. A shortage of foreign currency led to severe banking restrictions on import financing, destabilising trade and making it difficult to import goods of any kind. The US Foreign Commercial Service in Cairo reported that the number of American companies contacting it for help with non-payment issues more than quadrupled in 2023 — Egypt-

tian buyers who had traded reliably for years were unable to settle.

This is the detail that trade professionals will recognise as decisive. Letters of credit became difficult to obtain. Suppliers who had extended terms for years began demanding cash in advance, precisely when cash was hardest to obtain. Distributors were squeezed from both directions simultaneously.

The macro picture confirms it was economy-wide: Egypt's non-oil private sector PMI contracted for 37 consecutive months through December 2023, with S&P Global attributing the weakness to the pound and persistent supply shortages driving input cost inflation and falling customer spending. Even Samsung was affected — a company source told Enterprise in March 2024 that construction of its new Beni Suef factory had been delayed while waiting on imported materials, and that the main impediment was FX availability rather than investment cost.

## 3. The state closed the import channel entirely

While distributors were struggling with currency, the government was systematically eliminating the business they were in.

The numbers are extraordinary. Egypt's mobile phone import bill fell from approximately \$1.6 billion



in 2021 to \$1.65 million in the first half of 2024 — a decline of roughly 99.9%, as reported by the vice president of the Mobile Phone Division at the Cairo Chamber of Commerce.

(A note on this figure: some reports render the 2021 base as \$16 billion rather than \$1.6 billion. The lower figure is far more plausible for a market of Egypt's size, and the discrepancy appears to originate in a translation or transcription error that has propagated across outlets. The direction and magnitude of the collapse are not in dispute; the precise base year figure should be treated with caution.)

This was deliberate policy, designed to relieve pressure on foreign currency reserves by forcing localisation. For an importer, it was an extinction event. The activity that defined the business was reduced to a rounding error in under three years.

#### 4. Four-fifths of the market was declared illegal

The final blow landed in January 2025.

The National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority had concluded that roughly 80% of smartphones entering Egypt in 2023 and early 2024 were illegally imported, bypassing taxes. In response, the government introduced IMEI whitelisting: every handset had to be registered before it could connect to an Egyptian mobile network. Devices now carried a combined 38.5% in customs duties and taxes.

Canalys called it a structural reset for the industry — an accurate description. Shipments fell 18% year-on-year, from 780,000 units in January 2024 to 642,000 in January 2025. The significance of the 80% figure deserves emphasis. It means the visible, licensed distribution business was the minority of the actual market. Enormous volumes moved through grey channels — parallel imports, traveller allowances, undeclared shipments — and an entire ecosystem of traders, retailers, and repair shops was built on stock that had never passed through official channels. Whitelisting did not merely tax that trade. It made the devices technically inoperable.

Legally imported phones ended up 20–30% more expensive than the grey-market equivalents they replaced, reflecting duties and higher operating costs. Everyone in the chain had to absorb or pass on that gap, in a market where consumers had just lost half their purchasing power.

## PART TWO: THE RISE

### 1. The factories arrived

The state was not only destroying the import trade. It was building the thing meant to replace it.

Samsung's position in Egypt is longer-standing than most coverage suggests: the company's Beni Suef complex represents total investment exceeding \$700 million since its establishment in 2013, and is Samsung's first factory in the Middle East and Africa — one of only 14 worldwide, according to Samsung Egypt's chairman.

The mobile expansion came later. In June 2023, following a meeting between the Minister of Communications and Samsung Egypt's chairman, agreement was reached for a dedicated handset facility in Beni Suef. Samsung had produced its first made-in-Egypt phones in 2022, and secured a golden licence for the project.

By 2026 the operation had scaled considerably. Egypt's Minister of Communications inspected the site in May 2026: approximately 9,000 square metres, nearly \$100 million in investment for that facility, around 1,500 direct and indirect jobs. In 2025 the plant produced roughly 2.2 million mobile phones and 600,000 tablets, serving the local market and supporting exports. A second facility launched in 2025 raised combined capacity toward 6 million units.

Samsung was not alone. Oppo built in Beni Suef (4.5 million units annually, ~\$30 million, 650 jobs). Xiaomi established its first MEA factory in 6th of October City. Vivo's plant in 10th of Ramadan City added 500,000 units monthly and 1,500 jobs. Egyptian firms including SICO and KMG entered manufacturing.

The national output figures tell the story: roughly 3 million units in 2024, around 10 million in 2025, with a stated target of 15 million in 2026. Government projections suggested local production could eventually meet up to 80% of domestic demand.

### 2. The market came back

The recovery in demand was real and faster than the collapse.

Canalys data showed Egypt leading North Africa in Q1 2025 with shipments up 34% year-on-year — the strongest growth on the continent — attributed to whitelisting curbing grey imports, improved macro conditions, and the localisation push. Samsung held roughly 21% share







across Africa in that period, with A-series devices accounting for around 60% of its shipments — mid-range volume products, exactly the segment now being assembled domestically.

Macro conditions supported it. Egyptian inflation declined every month from March 2024, though still running at 27.5% in June. The IMF programme resumed and expanded; Egypt joined the expanded BRICS grouping in 2024.

The regulatory regime also softened at the edges. In April 2026, the Customs Authority and NTRA launched an instalment payment option for fees on personally imported handsets, delivered through consumer finance provider Valu — an acknowledgement that a 38.5% lump-sum charge was more than many households could absorb.

### PART THREE: WHAT ACTUALLY CHANGED

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The channel did not simply recover. It was replaced by something structurally different.

The import licence stopped being the asset. For decades, the ability to bring stock into Egypt was the distributor's moat. When imports fall 99% and 80% of the existing market is declared illegal, that moat becomes a liability — an asset built around a activity the state has eliminated.

Distributors became service providers. The surviving model is visible in how the larger operators now describe themselves. Sky Distribution — Samsung's distribution partner since 2009, and Etisalat's since 2007 — presents a business spanning distribution, retail, and after-sales: roughly 124 retail stores with over 550 staff,





13+ distribution centres, more than 120 points of sale, and around 20 Samsung after-sales service centres built up over 14 years. Its parent, Sky Investments, describes after-sales as a deliberate high-margin strategy.

That is not an importer's business model. It is a logistics, retail, and services business — and critically, most of it survives the transition to local manufacturing intact. Domestically-built phones still need warehousing, distribution to thousands of retail points, retail floor space, and warranty service. The margin moved from the import spread to the service layer.

Grey traders faced a binary outcome. Formalise or exit. There is no version of the parallel import trade

that survives IMEI whitelisting, because the product simply does not work.

Financing became the competitive edge. With devices 20–30% more expensive through legal channels and consumer purchasing power halved, the ability to offer instalments determines sales. Egypt's BNPL market is projected to reach \$4.74 billion by 2030; providers like valU and MNT-Halan are consolidating. The distributor's edge is no longer cheaper stock — it is better credit terms.

#### **PART FOUR: WHAT THIS MEANS GOING FORWARD**

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##### **1. The import-distribution model is finished in emerging markets that can manufacture.**

Egypt has demonstrated a repeatable playbook: restrict imports to protect FX reserves, offer incentives to attract OEM assembly, then use device registration to enforce compliance. Any country with sufficient market size, cheap labour, and a foreign currency problem can follow it. Nigeria, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia all have the preconditions. Distributors whose value proposition is “we can bring stock in” should assume that proposition has a limited lifespan.

##### **2. IMEI registration is a genuinely new enforcement tool — and it will spread.**

This is the underappreciated development. Governments have always tried to tax phone imports; smugglers have always found ways around it. Network-level registration is different because it makes enforcement technical rather than administrative. A device that cannot connect is worthless regardless of how it entered the country. Egypt has proven the model works at national scale. Expect adoption elsewhere, and expect it to eliminate parallel import trades that have operated profitably for decades.

##### **3. Local assembly changes brand competition, not just logistics.**

When Samsung, Oppo, Vivo, and Xiaomi all assemble in Egypt, the cost differences between them narrow because they face identical local input costs, labour rates, and duty structures. Competition shifts toward distribution reach, retail presence, financing partnerships, and after-sales quality — precisely the capabilities that surviving distributors have spent the crisis building. The distributor's leverage over the brand may actually increase.



#### 4. Egypt is positioning as an export hub, which raises the stakes.

Both Samsung and KMG have indicated that the priority is shifting toward exports. If Egypt becomes a genuine regional manufacturing base serving Africa and the Middle East, the distribution infrastructure built for the domestic market acquires regional value. That is a substantially larger opportunity than the domestic channel it replaced — and it is the strongest argument that the rebuilt channel is worth more than the one that broke.

#### 5. The 2026 memory shortage is the next test.

The timing is unkind. Just as Egypt's channel stabilises, global smartphone economics are deteriorating. IDC reported Q1 2026 global shipments down 2.9% year-on-year, breaking a ten-quarter growth streak, driven by memory supply constraints. IDC noted that in several emerging markets prices have risen by as much as 40–50%, weighing heavily on demand in price-sensitive regions — and that OEMs are responding with reduced marketing and channel support.

Reduced channel support is the phrase that matters for distributors. Egypt's rebuilt channel is about to be tested

by a component shortage originating on the other side of the world, in a market where consumers are already stretched. Local assembly insulates against FX shocks; it does nothing against a global DRAM squeeze.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

The story of Egyptian mobile distribution between 2021 and 2026 is not a company failing and recovering. It is an entire business model being legislated out of existence and a different one being built in its place, at speed, under duress.

The distributors who came through did so by ceasing to be importers. The ones who defined themselves by their ability to source and land stock had the ground removed from under them by a state that decided FX reserves mattered more than trade convenience — and then, remarkably, built the factories to prove the point.

Whether that counts as a fall and a rise depends on where you stand. The channel is larger, more formal, and more defensible than it was in 2021. It is also unrecognisable to anyone who built a business in it a decade ago. ■

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# Amazon's Return Problem:

## How Fraud Is Cracking the Door Open for Rivals

For twenty years, the frictionless return was Amazon's quiet weapon. Not the price, not the two-day shipping — the fact that you could buy something on a whim, decide against it, and send it back without argument. That promise removed the last hesitation from online buying, and it made Amazon feel less risky than a physical store.

That weapon is now turning in Amazon's hand. A wave of return fraud has grown large enough to force the company to defend itself, and every defensive move it makes chips away at the very thing that made shoppers loyal. Meanwhile, sellers squeezed between generous refunds and rising fees are quietly building their businesses elsewhere. The result is a slow structural opening for competitors that Amazon spent two decades keeping shut.

### JUST HOW BIG THE PROBLEM GOT

The numbers are no longer a rounding error on anyone's balance sheet.

American shoppers were projected to send back roughly \$849.9 billion in merchandise during 2025, according to the National Retail Federation's returns research with Happy Returns. That represents about 15.8% of annual retail sales — and online is materially worse, at an estimated 19.3% return rate for e-commerce purchases. Of that total, the NRF found roughly 9% of all returns

were fraudulent. Run the arithmetic and you land somewhere near \$76 billion in deliberately dishonest returns in a single year. To see the trajectory, compare it to 2020: return volume was \$428 billion and fraud was estimated at around 6% of returns. In five years the fraudulent slice roughly tripled in value.

Appriss Retail and Deloitte, using a different methodology, put 2024 return-and-claims fraud even higher — around \$103 billion, or about 15% of all returns that year. The estimates disagree, which is itself telling: nobody has a precise number, because the whole point of fraud is not being counted.

### THE PLAYBOOK FRAUDSTERS ACTUALLY USE

This isn't one scam. It's a genre, and retailers who track it report every variant is growing:

The empty box. Sometimes called a "box of rocks" return — the buyer ships back a package weighted with junk, or nothing at all, and collects a refund before anyone opens it. Among retailers tracking incidents, 65% reported an increase in this tactic.

Overstated quantity. Claiming to return five units while shipping back two. 71% of tracking retailers saw this rise — making it the single most-reported fraud pattern.

The decoy swap. A counterfeit, a broken older unit, or a visually similar cheap substitute goes back in the original packaging. 64% of retailers reported growth here. Electronics sellers are hit hardest, because a phone or a controller in a sealed-looking box passes casual inspection.

Wardrobing and event use. Buy a device or garment, use it for the thing you needed it for, return it inside the window. This one isn't technically fraud under most policies — which is exactly what makes it expensive. Amazon's extended holiday return window, which ran through late January 2026 for most categories, meant an item bought in early November could be used through the entire holiday season and returned legally in January.





The seller absorbs a used product returned as new.

Label and tracking manipulation. More sophisticated operators forge shipping data or exploit the gap between “return initiated” and “return received” to trigger refunds on parcels that never move.

There's also a demographic dimension retailers are watching closely: Gen Z shoppers averaged 7.7 online returns per person in 2025, the highest of any age group. Returning things is simply normal behavior for the cohort now entering peak spending years.

### WHY AMAZON'S STRUCTURE MAKES IT WORSE

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Every retailer faces return fraud. Amazon faces a specific version of it that its own architecture created.

The refund happens before the inspection. Amazon's customer-first instinct is to refund fast and sort out the details later. That's excellent for buyer trust and catastrophic for fraud control, because the money is gone before anyone confirms what actually came back in the box.

The seller eats the loss, not Amazon. Most units on Amazon are sold by third-party merchants. When a fraudulent return lands, the marketplace has already collected its referral and fulfillment fees. The financial hole appears in the seller's P&L. Amazon's SAFE-T reimbursement program exists to compensate sellers, but it's discretionary — Amazon decides fault and payout, and reported recovery on damaged returns is often capped well below the full value.

Scale defeats inspection. At Amazon's volume, physically examining every return is economically impossible. The company leans on automated systems and returnless refunds, which means a meaningful share of fraudulent returns are never examined by anyone at all.

Anonymity. In a store, the returns desk sees your face. On Amazon, a determined fraudster can cycle through accounts, addresses, and payment methods with far less friction.

### THE CRACKDOWN — AND THE DAMAGE IT DOES

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Amazon has responded on both sides of the transaction, and both responses carry a cost.

On the buyer side, the company has been closing accounts of customers it deems excessive returners. Amazon has never published a threshold, and reporting on the practice going back several years documents shoppers being banned with no warning, no stated reason, and in some cases forfeited gift card balances — occasionally after only a handful of returns. Amazon's position is that it acts against a small number of people abusing the service over extended periods and encourages anyone who believes there's been an error to contact them.

The problem is precision. Without reliable detection, blanket enforcement inevitably catches honest customers. That's not a hypothetical risk — 71% of consumers say a poor returns experience makes them less likely to shop with that retailer again, per ReturnPro's 2026 consumer survey. And 82% of consumers cite free returns as an important factor when buying online, up from 76% the prior year. Amazon is tightening the exact policy shoppers say they care most about, at a moment when they care about it more than ever.

On the seller side, 2026 brought a series of changes that shifted risk downward:

- Effective February 8, 2026, all US seller-fulfilled orders were required to use Amazon's Prepaid Return Label program — eliminating the longstanding exemption for high-value items.
- The additional review that had applied to returns above roughly \$500 was removed, meaning expensive items now flow through the same fast-refund pipeline as a \$12 phone case. Sellers lose both the time and the leverage to dispute a suspicious return.





- Refund timelines compressed from 14 days to 7, and buyer-seller messaging during returns was removed — cutting off a channel sellers used to resolve disputes directly.
- A returns processing fee now applies to products exceeding category-specific return-rate thresholds, charged per unit above the line and calculated on size and weight.
- Fund withholding expanded to cover disputed and suspected-fraud returns, with appeals requiring full documentation inside a 60-day window.

Read together, these changes do something specific: they make Amazon's returns experience faster and cleaner for buyers while moving the financial and operational risk onto merchants.

## WHERE THE DOOR OPENS

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Here's the part Amazon can't easily engineer around. The company is simultaneously making returns worse for a slice of its buyers and more expensive for its sellers. Both groups have somewhere else to go now, in a way they didn't five years ago.

Sellers are already leaving — partially. Jungle Scout's 2026 State of the Amazon Seller report found 67% of Amazon sellers reporting declining margins over the prior twelve months, driven not by weak demand but by compounding costs. When a single platform policy change can materially damage a business, diversification stops being a growth tactic and becomes risk management.





The alternatives finally have scale. This is what's genuinely different about 2026:

- Walmart Marketplace has closed the overall gap substantially, with Walmart's 2026 revenue reported at roughly \$713.2 billion against Amazon's \$716.9 billion — under \$4 billion apart, on figures that would have looked absurd a decade ago.
- TikTok Shop generated about \$66 billion in global GMV in 2025, with projections above \$112 billion for 2026. Its US business drove \$4.9 billion in Q1 2026 alone, roughly doubling year-over-year per Charm.io data reported by the Wall Street Journal. eMarketer projects US TikTok Shop sales near \$23.4 billion in 2026 — a 48% jump. Circana has projected the platform could move from roughly 1% of US retail today toward 10% by 2028.

- Critically, TikTok Shop's fastest-growing buyer cohort in Q1 2026 was shoppers aged 45 and over, not Gen Z. Established brands including Ralph Lauren, Olaplex, and Ulta Beauty launched storefronts in April 2026, joining earlier entrants like Crocs and e.l.f. Beauty. This is no longer a youth experiment sellers can dismiss.
- Shopify remains the escape hatch for brands that want to own the customer relationship, the return policy, and the data outright.

None of these individually threatens Amazon's dominance. Collectively, they change the calculus. A seller no longer has to choose between Amazon and irrelevance. They can hedge — and every seller who hedges makes Amazon's catalog marginally less exclusive.

Buyers have alternatives too. A shopper banned from Amazon or frustrated by tightened rules is not stranded. Walmart delivers. Target delivers. Costco has a famously permissive return policy and a physical desk where a human looks at the item. The switching cost that used to protect Amazon has fallen dramatically.

### THE TRAP AMAZON IS IN

The dynamic is genuinely difficult, and it's worth stating plainly rather than treating Amazon as simply mismanaging things.

Amazon has three options, and each has a real cost:

1. Keep returns easy. Fraud continues at scale, sellers keep absorbing losses, margins keep eroding, and merchants keep diversifying away.
2. Tighten returns. Fraud drops, but the frictionless experience that built the moat degrades — and honest customers, who vastly outnumber fraudsters, feel the tightening most.
3. Detect fraud precisely. This is the only genuinely good answer, and it's the hardest. 85% of retailers are now deploying AI to detect and prevent return fraud, and returns-management vendors argue that precise detection is what removes the need for blunt instruments like blanket fees and shortened windows. But detection is a moving target. As one industry executive described it, fraud is a game of whack-a-mole — patterns adapt as fast as they're identified.



# amazon



There's also a trust dimension that the data supports. 73% of consumers said they would feel better about returning items if they knew returned goods were reused or refurbished, which suggests what actually erodes confidence isn't scrutiny — it's opacity. Amazon's refusal to publish return thresholds or explain account closures is, by that reading, a self-inflicted wound. Shoppers can accept rules. They struggle with rules they can't see.

## WHAT THIS ACTUALLY MEANS

Amazon isn't collapsing. Its scale, logistics network, and Prime ecosystem remain formidable, and returns fraud is an industry-wide problem — Walmart and TikTok Shop

will face the same pressures as they grow, likely with less sophisticated tooling.

But market position erodes at the margins, not at the center. Amazon's competitive advantage was never purely price or selection; it was the removal of risk from online buying. Fraud is forcing the company to put some of that risk back — onto sellers through fees and lost protections, onto buyers through opaque enforcement. Each increment is small. Cumulatively, they make Amazon feel a little more like every other retailer, at precisely the moment when several other retailers have finally achieved the scale to be a real alternative.

The competitors aren't winning because they've built something better. They're winning ground because Amazon is being forced to make itself slightly worse. ■

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# Two Autumns a Year:

## Inside Apple's Break With the September Ritual

For more than a decade, Apple compressed its most important product decisions into a single week each September. Reporting suggests that ends in 2026 — the Pro models and the foldable arrive in the fall, the standard iPhone 18 waits until spring 2027, and the company's oldest marketing rhythm gets rebuilt around scarcity, margin, and a memory crisis nobody planned for.

The September Apple event has been one of the most reliable fixtures in consumer technology. Four new iPhones, one keynote, one narrative, one enormous holiday quarter. It has been the metronome that the entire Android industry sets its own launches against. According to reporting that has accumulated steadily since May 2025 and hardened through 2026, that metronome is being reset. September 2026 will reportedly bring three devices — iPhone 18 Pro, iPhone 18 Pro Max, and Apple's first foldable — and no standard iPhone at all. The iPhone 18 and iPhone 18e move to spring 2027, possibly joined by a second-generation iPhone Air. If that holds, 2026 becomes the first year in over a decade with no new base-model iPhone. The iPhone 17 will remain Apple's newest standard phone through the entire holiday season and into the following year.

Apple has confirmed none of this. But the reporting is unusually consistent across unusually good sources, and the reasons behind it say more about the state of the industry than about Apple's marketing preferences.

### WHAT IS REPORTEDLY CHANGING

Fall 2026: iPhone 18 Pro (6.3-inch), iPhone 18 Pro Max (6.9-inch), and the foldable — variously reported as iPhone Fold or iPhone Ultra, roughly 5.5 inches closed and 7.8 inches open, starting above \$2,000. The Pro models are expected to run an A20 Pro chip on a 2nm process, with a variable aperture camera, a smaller Dynamic Island, and Apple's in-house C2 modem. Pro Max battery capacity reportedly rises to around 5,100 mAh from 4,685 mAh.

Spring 2027: iPhone 18, iPhone 18e, and possibly the iPhone Air 2 — the latter reportedly delayed out of fall 2026, with Apple said to be considering a second camera and a lower price to broaden its appeal.

The reporting chain is worth tracing, because its consistency is the strongest evidence available. The first rumours appeared in May 2025. The Information reported the split citing supply-chain sources. Mark Gurman described the plan in Bloomberg's Power On. In January 2026, Nikkei Asia corroborated it — and added the detail that mattered most: the split was necessary for manufacturing reasons, not merely a marketing choice. That distinction is the story.

### THREE REASONS, AND THEY ARE NOT EQUALLY FLATTERING

#### 1. Manufacturing: the polite version and the real one

The stated logic is straightforward. A first-generation foldable requires new hinge engineering, new display assembly, tighter tolerances, and a more complex internal structure than any iPhone Apple has built. Adding a







standard iPhone ramp on top of that, in the same quarter, is a serious operational risk.

Staggering lets Apple prioritise flagship production without bottlenecks, and gives the foldable a manufacturing window it would not otherwise get.

The less polite version came via reporting on Apple's internal thinking: rising material costs — memory chips in particular — pushed the company toward concentrating resources on premium devices. One iPhone supplier executive framed the year bluntly, saying supply chain smoothness was among the key challenges.

Set that against the wider market. Global smartphone shipments are forecast to fall close to 14% in 2026, with memory costs accounting for more than 65% of the bill of materials on low-end devices. In that environment, a standard iPhone is precisely the product whose margins get destroyed by component inflation. Delaying it is not

only a scheduling decision; it is a decision about which products are worth building while inputs are expensive. Apple is not immune to the memory crisis. It is simply better placed than anyone else to restructure around it.

## **2. Cannibalisation: the Pro problem Apple created**

Every year, Apple faces a version of the same awkward question at its own keynote: why buy the Pro?

Presenting a \$799 iPhone alongside a \$1,199 iPhone Pro invites direct comparison at the exact moment of purchase intent. The gap narrows every generation, and the standard model is frequently good enough that the up-sell feels marginal.

Separating them by six months removes the comparison entirely. In the fall, the only new iPhones are premium. Buyers who want a new iPhone in the holiday quarter buy a Pro or wait — and Apple knows how many of them will wait.

# Apple Event

to be held on September 9



Forbes' Ewan Spence put the uncomfortable version of this well, asking whether consumers are choosing the iPhone that best fits their needs, or simply filling the economic slots Apple has structured for them.

### 3. Revenue smoothing and a second marketing moment

Apple's revenue has historically been violently seasonal — an enormous December quarter followed by a substantial drop. Two launch windows create two demand peaks, spreading revenue across fiscal quarters and reducing dependence on a single event.

There is a competitive dimension too. A spring launch gives Apple a new phone to put against the Android flagships announced around Mobile World Congress in March — a period when Apple has traditionally had nothing new to show. Instead of ceding that news cycle, Apple occupies it.

#### THIS IS BIGGER THAN THE IPHONE

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The most under-reported aspect is that iPhone is not the only line being staggered.

iPad. Bloomberg reports Apple plans iPad refreshes running from fall 2026 through spring 2027. The base iPad was conspicuously skipped

at the March 2026 event despite the M4 iPad Air shipping — reportedly to avoid cannibalising more expensive models. The next iPad Air, with a lower-cost OLED panel, is reported for around March 2027, with Samsung panel production starting December 2026. No new iPad Pro is expected in 2026 at all.

Mac. The MacBook Ultra was reportedly targeted for late 2026 and has slipped to early 2027 — attributed directly to the AI-driven memory shortage.

The pattern is consistent: premium hardware gets priority, entry-level hardware gets deferred, and the release calendar spreads across a full year rather than clustering. What reads as an iPhone marketing decision is closer to a company-wide reallocation of constrained components toward the highest-margin products.

#### THE LEADERSHIP CHANGE NOBODY SHOULD IGNORE

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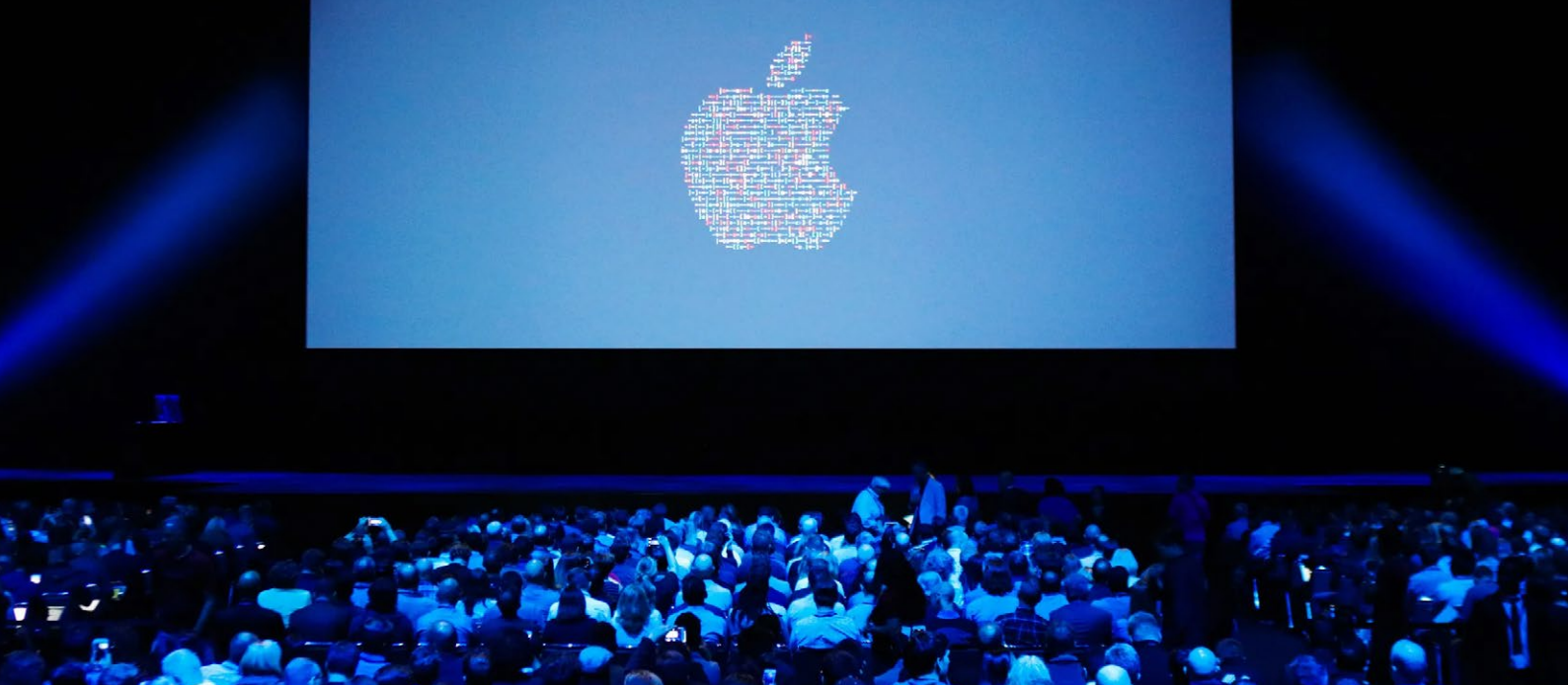
There is a detail that most coverage of the release strategy mentions only in passing, and it deserves more weight.

Tim Cook steps down as Apple CEO on August 31, 2026. John

Ternus becomes CEO on September 1, 2026 — announced April 20, 2026, with Cook moving to executive chairman. Ternus, 50, joined Apple in 2001 and has run hardware engineering as SVP since 2021.







Read the calendar. Ternus takes over on the first day of the month in which Apple launches its first foldable, debuts a restructured release cadence, and ships a 2nm flagship — while navigating the worst component crisis in years. The symbolism is hard to miss. Apple is handing the company from an operations executive to a hardware engineer at the precise moment its product strategy becomes a hardware and supply chain problem. Cook's tenure was defined by supply chain mastery in an era of abundance; Ternus inherits an era of scarcity. It would be over-reading to attribute the staggered strategy to Ternus — the reporting predates his appointment by roughly a year. But he will own its execution and its consequences from day one.

### WHAT COULD GO WRONG

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The strategy has real risks, and they are not being discussed much.

A year without a base iPhone is unprecedented. The standard model is the volume seller. Leaving the iPhone 17 as the newest non-Pro option through the holiday quarter and into 2027 means the price-sensitive buyer gets nothing new during the highest-spending period of the year. Some of those buyers wait. Others buy an Android device, and Apple never gets them back. Spring launches carry less weight. September is a cultural event; March is a press release. The iPhone 18 arriving quietly in spring 2027 will get a fraction of the attention it would have received on stage in September — for the model most people actually buy.

Apple is betting the brand carries it. That is probably right, and it is still a bet.

Compressed schedules break. If the foldable's production window is as tight as reported — roughly six to seven weeks between mass production and on-sale — any yield problem pushes shipping into October or December. A staggered strategy that itself slips undermines the operational rationale for staggering.

Consumer confusion is real. "iPhone 18 Pro is out but iPhone 18 isn't" is a genuinely strange sentence. Apple's naming has always implied a lineup released together. Numbering that no longer maps to a launch window creates friction that Apple's marketing has historically been careful to avoid.

And it hands Android a window. A fall with no new standard iPhone is an opening Samsung, Google, and the Chinese manufacturers will target directly. Whether they can exploit it in a year when they are being squeezed harder by memory costs than Apple is a separate question — but the opening exists.

### WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE INDUSTRY

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The single-launch model is ending, and not only at Apple. Once the largest player in the market moves to two windows, the competitive calendar everyone else builds against fragments. Samsung already runs Unpacked twice yearly; the difference is Apple's gravitational pull on retail attention, carrier promotion, and component allocation.

Component scarcity is now a strategic input, not an operational detail. For twenty years, product roadmaps were set



by what engineering could deliver and marketing wanted to sell. In 2026, they are being set by what memory suppliers will allocate. Apple deferring the base iPhone, the base iPad, and the MacBook Ultra is the same decision made three times: build the expensive thing first, because the cheap thing no longer carries its own component costs. Premium concentration accelerates. Everything in Apple's fall 2026 lineup is expensive. Combined with foldables at \$2,000+ and industry-wide price rises, the direction is unmistakable: fewer devices, higher prices, more revenue per unit. That is rational for manufacturers and worse for buyers, and it is where the entire industry is heading. The upgrade cycle stretches further. If the newest standard iPhone during the holidays is a year old, some buyers simply skip a cycle. Combined with rising prices and lengthening replacement intervals, this compounds a volume decline that is already the steepest on record.

## THE HONEST ASSESSMENT

The framing that Apple has chosen a clever new market-rhythm is only half right. Apple has always staggered

products when it suited them — the iPhone e-series in spring, iPads and Macs scattered across the year. What is new is applying that to the flagship line, and the reason is not primarily marketing.

Nikkei's detail is the one to keep: the split is reportedly necessary for manufacturing reasons. Apple is not choosing to build fewer things in the fall of 2026 because a two-act structure is elegant. It is choosing because building a first-generation foldable, two 2nm flagships, and a mass-market iPhone simultaneously, during the worst memory shortage in a decade, is not a plan anyone would sign off on.

The elegant marketing story — two peaks, less cannibalisation, a March counter-punch — is real, and Apple will tell it well. It is also the story you tell when a constraint has forced your hand and you have the brand strength to make the constraint look like a strategy.

Which, to be fair, is a genuine competitive advantage. Most companies facing the same shortage are cutting specifications and hoping nobody notices. Apple is reorganising its calendar and getting credit for innovation. ■

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- APPLE HAS CONFIRMED NOTHING ABOUT THE IPHONE 18 SCHEDULE. EVERY ELEMENT OF THE SPLIT LAUNCH IS REPORTED RATHER THAN ANNOUNCED. THE LEADERSHIP TRANSITION (SOURCES 18-21) IS THE ONE CONFIRMED FACT HERE, DISCLOSED VIA APPLE NEWSROOM.
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- SOURCES 10-12 AND 15 ARE AGGREGATION SITES REPROCESSING PRIMARY REPORTING; SOURCE 10 IN PARTICULAR CARRIES A SUPPLIER QUOTE THAT COULD NOT BE TRACED TO AN ORIGINAL OUTLET AND SHOULD BE TREATED AS UNVERIFIED.
- SCHEDULES OF THIS KIND CHANGE. THE IPHONE AIR 2 HAS ALREADY MOVED ONCE, THE BASE IPAD SLIPPED ITS SPRING WINDOW, AND THE MACBOOK ULTRA HAS BEEN PUSHED TO 2027. ANYTHING HERE COULD SHIFT BEFORE SEPTEMBER.



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# Salt Instead of Scarcity:

How CATL's Sodium Battery Launch Redraws the Map of the Energy Transition

CATL's TENER Sodium system moves sodium-ion storage from laboratory promise to signed contracts. The technology matters less than what it does to a supply chain that three countries currently control.

On June 22, 2026, in Munich, CATL unveiled the TENER Sodium Energy Storage System and made a claim that sounded modest and was not: that sodium-ion grid storage had reached full commercial maturity across technology, manufacturing capacity, and supply chain. The product itself is a large steel box. The consequence is a structural change in who holds leverage over the world's electricity infrastructure.



For a decade, the energy transition has carried an uncomfortable dependency. Every solar farm that needs to store daytime output, every wind installation that must smooth its intermittency, every data center hedging against grid instability — all of it has been anchored to lithium. And lithium comes from very few places. If sodium-ion storage genuinely works at scale, that anchor loosens. This is the first serious evidence that it might.

## WHAT CATL ACTUALLY ANNOUNCED

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The specifications are worth stating precisely, because the gap between a demonstration unit and a shippable product is where most battery announcements die.

The system. TENER Sodium delivers more than 30 MWh of rated capacity on a fully modular architecture. Each module weighs roughly 42 tonnes, and a 1 GWh site requires only 34 of them. Energy and power blocks are decoupled, supporting storage durations of 1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 hours depending on project need. Faulty modules can be isolated and swapped independently rather than taking a station offline.

The longevity claim. CATL states the system achieves 15,000 cycles at 25°C, translating to a 25–30 year service life measured against a 70% state-of-health threshold. If that holds in the field, it is a genuinely long asset life for grid storage — comfortably beyond typical LFP warranties.

The engineering details. Four features do real work:

- A dedicated bidirectional (Bi-DC) voltage regulation system compensates for sodium chemistry's wide voltage range, automatically boosting output in the low-voltage band. CATL claims this lifts round-trip efficiency by nearly 2% and holds output at 690V. On a 1 GWh station, two percentage points of RTE is millions of additional kilowatt-hours annually.
- A purpose-built BMS exploits sodium's continuously sloping voltage curve for more accurate state-of-charge estimation — a genuine advantage over LFP, whose flat discharge curve makes SOC notoriously hard to read. CATL also reports a 20% higher over-charge tolerance than lithium-ion, giving the BMS additional safety margin.
- A top-discharge airflow design eliminates thermal-island effects, cutting system heat generation

by nearly 30% and reducing auxiliary power consumption from an industry-typical 2% to 1%.

- Operating noise of 65 dB — about 10 dB below conventional systems. That is not a footnote. Noise complaints routinely push storage sites away from load centers; quieter installations can be built closer to demand, saving substantial transmission and distribution costs.

On safety, CATL cites a 40% reduction in cell expansion force, 35% less gas generation, and thermal runaway surface temperatures around 200°C — materially higher than conventional lithium cells.

The commercial position. This is the part that separates the announcement from a press release. CATL has invested nearly €1.2 billion in sodium-ion R&D since 2016, accumulating over 1,600 patent families and more than 200 globally granted patents. It has committed RMB 5 billion to add 40 GWh of annual sodium capacity at its Fuding base, with 160 GWh planned at Jining in Shandong. In April 2026 it signed a three-year, 60 GWh supply agreement with integrator HyperStrong — the largest sodium-ion contract ever placed. Chinese deliveries begin September 2026, cumulative shipments should hit 1 GWh by year-end, and international deliveries start June 2027. In July 2026, Dutch integrator Alfen — which has over 1 GWh installed across Europe — signed on for deployments beginning 2027.

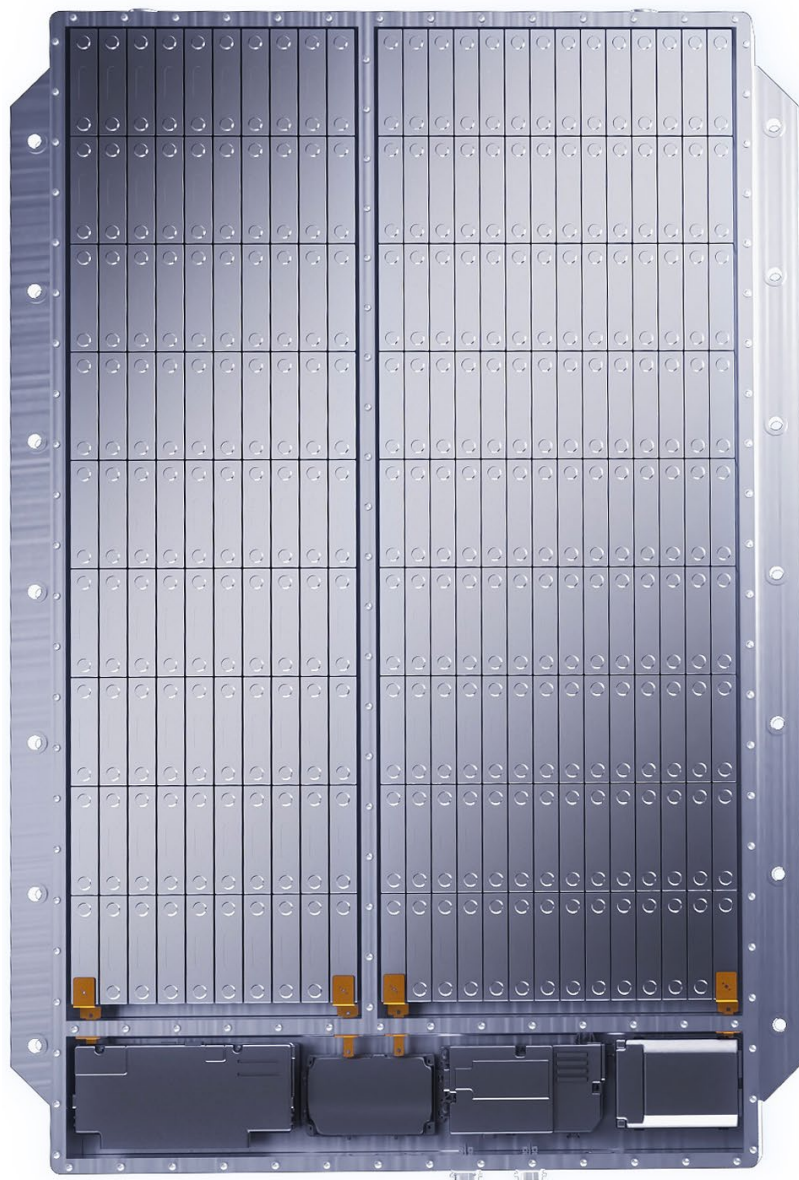
One design decision deserves particular attention: TENER Sodium shares a physical footprint with CATL's LFP systems. The same enclosure accepts either chemistry, without redesigning the project or repeating certification. That is a hedging instrument disguised as a product feature, and it is discussed further below.

## THE HONEST ECONOMICS

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CATL's framing invites skepticism, so it is worth separating what is established from what is projected.

Sodium is not yet cheaper than LFP. This is the single most important qualifier. Wood Mackenzie estimated 2025 average costs at roughly \$52/kWh for LFP against \$59/kWh for sodium-ion — sodium carrying a premium. Wood Mackenzie's global head of storage



frames sodium primarily as a hedge against lithium supply disruption and cost inflation rather than a cheaper option today, and the firm does not expect cost parity until around 2035.

Other analysts see a faster path. Several 2026 assessments put sodium-ion cells at \$50–56/kWh against LFP at \$52–55/kWh, projecting sodium falls below LFP in 2027 and opens a \$15–20/kWh structural advantage thereafter. CATL's second-generation Naxtra cells have been cited at roughly \$77/kWh in comparisons using different accounting boundaries.

The estimates disagree by a wide margin, and readers should treat the optimistic end with caution — much of it originates from vendors and integrators with a commercial stake. What the range does establish is that sodium's premium is a scale problem, not a materials problem. Global sodium-ion production was under

5 GWh in 2025 against LFP's decades of gigawatt-scale optimization. IRENA has projected cell costs reaching roughly \$40/kWh by 2030 as production scales toward 400 GWh annually.

Where sodium wins today. Even at cost parity or a slight premium, sodium has genuine advantages: superior cold-weather performance, better thermal safety margins, no cobalt or nickel requirement, and aluminum current collectors replacing copper at the anode — a saving of roughly \$6/kWh that is structural rather than volume-dependent.

Where it still loses. Energy density. Sodium-ion runs approximately 110–160 Wh/kg against LFP's 160–200 Wh/kg, meaning physically larger installations for equivalent capacity. For grid storage on open land, that is close to irrelevant. For vehicles or space-constrained sites, it remains decisive.





The strategic significance of sodium-ion has almost nothing to do with battery performance. It has to do with geography.

Lithium is extraordinarily concentrated. Roughly 77% of raw lithium production comes from three countries — Australia (~35%), China (~22%), and Chile (~19%). Refining is worse: approximately 70% of global lithium chemical conversion happens in China, and the top three refining countries account for around 95% of capacity. North America and Europe together hold roughly 2–3%.

That concentration produces exactly the volatility you would predict. Lithium reached US\$20,750 per tonne in March 2026, up 84% year over year, after Chinese regulatory shutdowns — including CATL's own Jianxiawo mine, roughly 3% of global supply — tightened inventories. New lithium projects take 7–15 years from exploration to production, so supply cannot respond quickly to price signals. Some analyses project a 20–30% market deficit in the 2030–35 window on current project pipelines.

Sodium inverts the geography entirely. Sodium is over 1,000 times more abundant than lithium and distributed across every continent. There is no sodium triangle, no sodium chokepoint, no sodium cartel — the input is, functionally, salt.

This is why CATL's own framing emphasizes energy independence and a chemistry “based upon abundant resources available across all continents.” The company's stated position is that sodium and lithium will form twin foundations of future storage rather than one replacing the other.

There is an irony worth naming: the company most credibly offering to break lithium's supply chokehold is Chinese, and China is the entity that currently benefits most from that chokehold. Sodium-ion does not eliminate dependency on Chinese manufacturing — it relocates the dependency from Chinese refining to Chinese cell production. Western policymakers looking at sodium as a decoupling strategy should read that carefully. CATL's July 2026 statement responding to a U.S. congressional report is a reminder that this technology arrives inside an active geopolitical dispute.

### 1. AI data centers become the anchor demand.

The timing is not coincidental. AI-driven electricity demand is straining grids in every major market, and storage has shifted from a supporting role to critical infrastructure. Data centers need enormous, reliable, safe storage; they are not space-constrained in the way a vehicle is; and they are acutely sensitive to fire risk. Sodium's thermal safety profile and low noise — permitting installation nearer to load centers — map almost perfectly onto that use case. Expect data center operators to be among the earliest large non-Chinese buyers.

### 2. Lithium's price ceiling gets capped — permanently.

Even if sodium never takes majority market share, its existence changes lithium pricing. A credible substitute at roughly comparable cost means lithium producers can no longer extract unlimited rents during shortages, because above a certain price, buyers switch. One 2026 analysis projects sodium-ion capturing 20–30% of stationary storage by 2028 and establishing a permanent industry cost floor around \$50–60/kWh. Pure-play lithium miners with high breakeven costs face structural margin compression.

CATL's shared-footprint design is the mechanism that makes this real. A developer who can drop either chemistry into the same enclosure without recertification holds genuine negotiating leverage against lithium price spikes. That optionality is arguably worth more than the sodium cells themselves.

### 3. Cold-climate and emerging markets open up.

Lithium-ion degrades badly in cold. Sodium's superior low-temperature performance makes storage viable in Northern Europe, Canada, Russia, and high-altitude regions where lithium systems require expensive thermal management. Simultaneously, the abundance argument matters most for countries with no lithium access and no foreign exchange to import it at volatile prices. Africa, South Asia, and Latin America gain a storage pathway that does not require competing with wealthy buyers for scarce material.

### 4. A second manufacturing race begins — with the West behind but not out.

The West largely lost the lithium battery race. Sodium is early enough that the outcome is undecided.



Peak Energy shipped the first US grid-scale sodium-ion system, with GM backing its platform. Natron and Northvolt have pursued Prussian Blue cathode approaches. Wood Mackenzie forecasts US lithium-ion production doubling from 96 GWh in 2024 to 196 GWh in 2026, with manufacturers pivoting toward stationary storage as EV incentives contracted.

But CATL's ten-year, €1.2 billion head start and 200 GWh of planned sodium capacity is a formidable lead. The realistic Western play is not catching CATL on cost — it is securing domestic sodium capacity for grid infrastructure where supply chain sovereignty outweighs price.

#### **5. Renewables get cheaper to integrate — which changes everything downstream.**

The unglamorous consequence is the largest. Storage cost is the binding constraint on renewable penetration; solar and wind are already cheap, but firming them is not. Every dollar per kWh removed from storage makes a marginal renewable project viable that previously was not. If sodium reaches \$40/kWh by 2030 while removing supply chain risk, the economics of high-renewable grids improve substantially — in developing economies most of all, where capital costs dominate and lithium import exposure is painful.

#### **WHAT COULD GO WRONG**

Intellectual honesty requires stating the failure modes.

The cycle life claim is unverified. 15,000 cycles and 25–30 year life are manufacturer figures. No sodium-ion grid system has operated for 25 years, because the technology has not existed that long. Real-world degradation under variable temperature and irregular cycling may diverge from lab conditions. Some independent assessments place current sodium-ion cycle life at 3,000–5,000 cycles — a wide gap from CATL's figure that likely reflects different chemistries and test conditions, but one that has not been closed by field data.

“Field-validated” is doing heavy lifting. The phrase appears throughout CATL's materials but the underlying validation data is not public. This deserves scrutiny rather than acceptance.

Cost parity may not arrive on schedule. Wood Mackenzie's 2035 estimate and the vendor consensus of 2027 differ by eight years. If Wood Mackenzie is closer to correct, sodium remains a hedging instrument rather than a mainstream chemistry for another decade.



LFP is not standing still. CATL's own second-generation 587Ah storage cells represent continued lithium improvement. Sodium is chasing a moving target, and the incumbent has vastly deeper manufacturing experience.

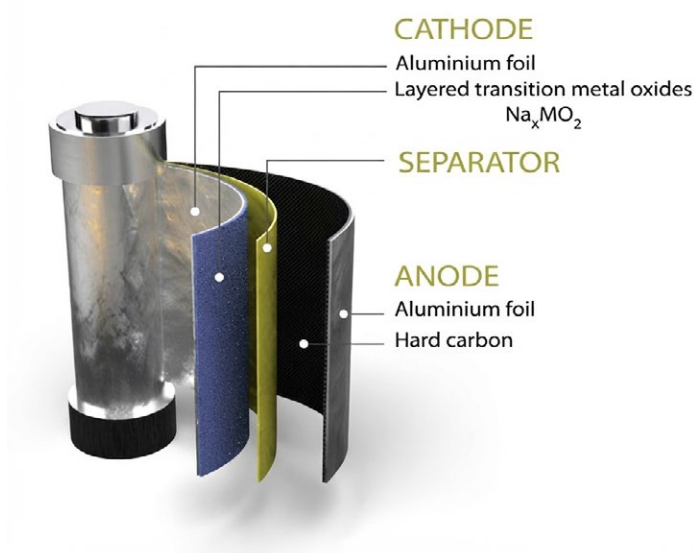
Warranty and financing lag technology. Grid storage is project-financed, and lenders price unfamiliar technology as risk. Until sodium accumulates operating history and insurers underwrite it on comparable terms, developers will pay a financing premium that offsets some hardware savings. This is a slow, unglamorous barrier that rarely appears in launch coverage.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

CATL has not announced a better battery. It has announced a second battery — a viable alternative chemistry with real production capacity behind it, at a moment when the world's storage infrastructure runs on a supply chain three countries control.

Whether TENER Sodium specifically succeeds matters less than the precedent. The 60 GWh HyperStrong contract, the Alfen deal, and 200 GWh of planned capacity establish that sodium-ion has crossed from research into procurement. Once a technology enters purchase orders, its improvement curve is driven by manufacturing scale rather than laboratory breakthroughs — and

## Sodium-Ion Battery Interior



manufacturing scale is the one thing CATL has proven it can deliver.

The energy transition has always had a hidden fragility: an infrastructure meant to free the world from concentrated fossil fuel supply chains that was itself built on a concentrated mineral supply chain. Sodium-ion is the first credible answer to that contradiction. It arrives late, it arrives expensive, and it arrives from a country with its own strategic interests in the outcome.

It still arrives. ■

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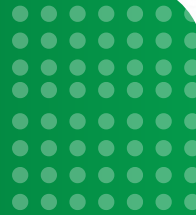






# UPtech USA Corp:

Experience-Driven Trading  
with Integrity at Its Core



## Company Overview



Established in January 2023, **UPtech USA Corp** may be a new entrant in the trading space, but it is firmly built on over a decade of experience. Its founder, Ms. **Pratima Dutt**, has been a trusted name in the industry since 2010, known for her strategic insight, reliability, and dedication to client success.

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Specializing in the sourcing and distribution of **Apple products**, UPtech USA Corp has quickly carved out a niche by offering competitive pricing, fast turnaround times, and impeccable service. Whether it's the latest **iPhones, iPads, or MacBooks**, the company ensures that clients receive genuine products and dependable support.

## Core Values



UPtech's mission is rooted in **transparency, professionalism, and long-term value.**

## Vision & Future



With integrity at its core and a sharp focus on premium electronics, **UPtech USA Corp** is poised to become a trusted leader in the global trading arena.

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# The Flagship Killer Is Dead:

## Inside OnePlus's Retreat and What's Left of It

In one week of July 2026, OnePlus confirmed it will stop launching phones in North America and Europe, announced it is retiring OxygenOS worldwide, and scheduled the shutdown of its own US community forum. Its India business insists nothing is wrong. Reporting suggests that changes in 2027.

The phrase was “flagship killer,” and for a few years it was accurate. A OnePlus phone in 2015 gave you the same processor as a Galaxy S6 for roughly half the money, running software that Android enthusiasts genuinely preferred to Samsung's. You had to be invited to buy one. People wanted invitations.

By the second quarter of 2026, OnePlus held under 1% of US smartphone shipments. On July 16, the company confirmed it would stop launching new products in North America and Europe entirely.

What makes this worth examining is not that a phone brand failed — many have. It is that OnePlus did not really fail in the conventional sense. It was absorbed, gradually and then suddenly, by the parent company that saved it. And the way it ended raises a question that will apply to a lot of hardware brands over the next few years: what exactly do you own when the company that made your phone stops existing as a distinct thing?

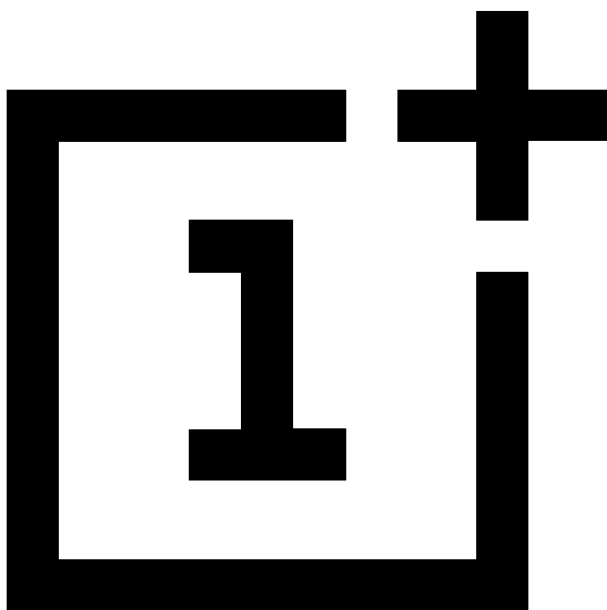
### WHAT WAS ANNOUNCED

The week of July 13–16, 2026 produced several distinct pieces of news that are easy to conflate.

Bloomberg broke it first. On July 15, Bloomberg reported that Oppo would wind down OnePlus operations across most global markets outside China — including a possible exit from India by 2027 — as part of a broader restructuring.

OnePlus confirmed the Western exit. The company told TechCrunch: “After careful assessment, OnePlus will no longer launch new products in Europe and North America. All users' rights and interests, including after-sales support and software updates, will remain fully guaranteed.”

Its own community post framed it as a “proactive global strategy adjustment,” concluding new product rollouts in North America. The US community site, [community-us.oneplus.com](https://community-us.oneplus.com), is scheduled to shut down entirely on August 16, 2026.



OxygenOS is being retired globally. This is the part that affects existing owners everywhere, including markets OnePlus is not leaving. All active OnePlus devices will transition to Oppo's ColorOS starting with their Android 17 update cycle. Once ColorOS 17 ships, eligible OnePlus devices worldwide will be offered a voluntary migration. OnePlus's stated rationale is streamlining development, accelerating updates, improving quality, and making better use of shared engineering and R&D.

A rollback path to OxygenOS is reportedly being preserved — though the practical trade-off appears to be that staying on OxygenOS may mean forgoing future updates. Maintenance support continues for older models outside the Android 17 scope.

India is contested. Bloomberg reported a full wind-down targeted for 2027. OnePlus India responded: "OnePlus India continues to operate its business as usual, with all local operations on track." No official exit has been announced. The company says its India service network is expanding by integrating with

Oppo's infrastructure, and that existing warranties, extended warranties, and damage protection plans remain valid.

Reporters covering the story have been unusually direct about the gap — 9to5Google noted that OnePlus is adamant it will continue in India while reliable reporting disagrees. Oppo's own spokesperson would confirm only that the OnePlus roadmap in China is unchanged. That is a narrow confirmation, and the narrowness is the signal.

Elsewhere, Realme swaps places. Per Bloomberg, OnePlus ends up active only in China, while Oppo's other brand Realme does the reverse — exiting China to focus on markets like the Nordics. Oppo is not withdrawing from the West. It is changing which badge it uses there.

#### HOW IT GOT HERE

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This was not a sudden collapse. The decline is well documented and took roughly six years.





Carl Pei left in 2020 to found Nothing, taking a substantial portion of the brand's contrarian identity with him. Co-founder Pete Lau remained, increasingly inside Oppo's structure.

The merger happened in stages. OnePlus and Oppo announced they were merging in 2021; OnePlus became an Oppo sub-brand around 2021–22. OxygenOS had already integrated its base code with ColorOS in 2021 — meaning July's announcement retired a brand identity that had been technically hollow for five years.

Oppo tried to buy its way out. In December 2022, Oppo publicly committed \$14 billion to support OnePlus — opening its retail stores and service centres to OnePlus customers and permitting sales at near-zero margins. The logic was the original OnePlus playbook: take share now, find profit later.

It did not work. In 2024, Oppo grew 2.8% while OnePlus declined more than 20%. By early 2026 the brand held roughly 1.1% of global smartphone shipments.

The infrastructure was dismantled quietly. The Dallas headquarters closed in March 2024, leaving a Palo Alto office reported to be down to around ten people. European staffing fell from roughly 60 to fewer than ten following cuts in France, Germany, and the UK begin-

ning in 2020. TechInsights attributed the share decline primarily to weak demand in North America and Western Europe.

Legal and commercial setbacks compounded. A German patent ban hit in 2022, followed by a second ban in 2024 months after the first lifted. Carrier relationships and retail presence eroded, with the brand fading from major US retailers.

And the Hasselblad partnership ended — while the Hasselblad branding continues on Oppo flagships. That single detail says as much about internal priority as any financial figure.

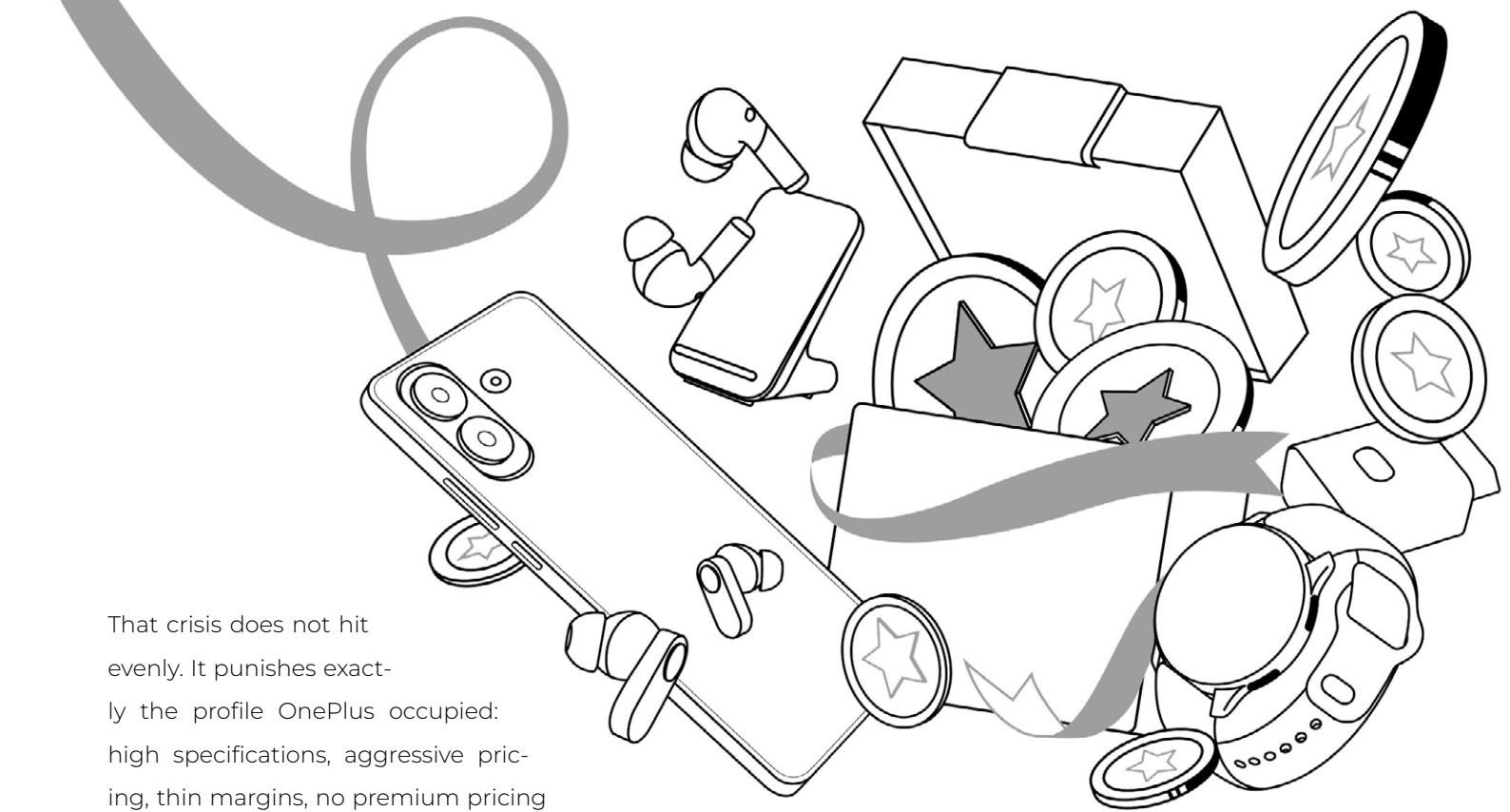
## WHY NOW: TWO FORCES CONVERGING

The timing is not coincidental, and it involves both a company-specific problem and an industry-wide one.

### 1. The memory crisis made marginal brands unviable

2026 is the worst year in smartphone history by shipment volume. IDC and Counterpoint both forecast declines exceeding 13%, driven by an AI-induced memory shortage that has pushed component costs to unprecedented levels.





That crisis does not hit evenly. It punishes exactly the profile OnePlus occupied: high specifications, aggressive pricing, thin margins, no premium pricing power to absorb input cost inflation. Oppo itself posted a double-digit year-over-year shipment decline in Q2 2026, with Counterpoint citing softness across most key markets.

When your parent company is contracting in a market shrinking 13%, subsidising a sub-brand at near-zero margin stops being a growth investment and becomes a liability.

## 2. The brands overlapped

The strategic case is simpler than the market case. Oppo's Find X series occupies the flagship position. Realme covers value. OnePlus sat between them, running a separate software team, separate design system, separate update pipeline, and separate marketing organisation — for a device family built on substantially the same underlying code.

Counterpoint's Maurice Klaehne put it plainly: OnePlus built its name on high-end specs at mid-range prices and aggressive global expansion, and that growth era is over — the company is now doubling down on China and retreating from the rest of the world.

Maintaining two engineering teams for one codebase is expensive in good years. In 2026 it is indefensible.

### WHAT THIS ACTUALLY MEANS IF YOU OWN ONE

Cutting through the panic headlines, here is the documented position.

Your phone keeps working. OnePlus has committed to software updates, security patches, and applicable

support for existing devices. Warranties and protection plans remain valid.

But you will likely have to change operating systems to keep receiving them. ColorOS migration begins with Android 17. The rollback to OxygenOS exists, but reporting indicates that path may not carry future updates. That is a meaningful choice being presented as an option: keep the software you bought, or keep getting security patches. Support quality is the real unknown. A company committing to support in a market it has exited has no commercial reason to invest in that support beyond the minimum. There is no next sale to protect. This is not an accusation — it is simply how incentives work, and it is the thing to watch rather than the promise itself.

Buying one now carries genuine risk. Android Authority's advice in the weeks before the confirmation was to avoid OnePlus until Oppo clarified its strategy, with North American buyers at greatest risk of being stranded. That assessment looks correct in hindsight. Stock will clear through existing channels; those units are the end of the line.

### WHAT'S LEFT, AND WHAT IT SIGNALS

OnePlus is not dead — it is domestic. The brand continues in China, where a OnePlus 16 flagship is expected. That is a real business in the world's largest smartphone market. But it is a different company from

# OxygenOS 16

## Intelligently Yours

the one that sold invite-only flagship killers to Western enthusiasts, and the global brand equity built over twelve years is now stranded in markets it no longer serves.

The enthusiast-brand model looks structurally fragile. OnePlus succeeded by being cheaper than flagships at similar specifications. That arbitrage depended on component costs falling predictably, on specifications being a meaningful differentiator, and on thin margins being survivable. All three assumptions have weakened. When specs converge and components inflate, “same performance, less money” stops being a business and becomes a squeeze. Nothing — founded by the OnePlus co-founder who left — is running a version of the same bet, and it is worth watching whether it fares differently.

Consolidation is the near-term pattern. Oppo’s restructuring is not a retreat from the West; it is a rationalisation of which badge sells where. Expect more of this: fewer brands, clearer segmentation, less overlap. The memory crisis is accelerating a consolidation that market maturity had already made likely.

Software promises are the weak point of the whole industry. The most transferable lesson has nothing to do with OnePlus specifically. Long-term update commitments — now marketed heavily as five, six, seven years of support — are promises made

by corporate entities that may not exist in recognisable form for that duration. OnePlus’s users were promised OxygenOS updates. They will receive updates, on ColorOS. The promise was honoured in letter and altered in substance, and there was no mechanism by which a buyer could have anticipated or prevented that.

Anyone buying a phone on the strength of a seven-year software commitment is making an implicit bet on corporate continuity that the industry does not generally invite them to think about.

### THE UNCOMFORTABLE PART

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There is a version of this story that treats Oppo as the villain — the corporate parent that absorbed a beloved brand and discarded it. That reading does not survive the numbers.

Oppo committed \$14 billion, opened its retail and service infrastructure, and permitted years of near-zero-margin sales. OnePlus declined anyway, by more than 20% in a single year, in a market where its parent grew. The rescue attempt was serious and it failed.

What actually happened is that OnePlus’s original proposition stopped being differentiated. Flagship performance became abundant and cheap. Every Chinese manufacturer learned to build well-specified phones at







aggressive prices. The thing OnePlus was uniquely good at became the industry baseline, and once the software was sharing a codebase with Oppo's anyway, there was no remaining answer to the question of why the brand

needed to exist separately.

The flagship killer did not lose to Samsung or Apple. It lost because it won the argument, everyone copied it, and there was nothing left to be. ■

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# If Electronics Doesn't Become Intelligent

It Becomes Irrelevant

Why AI is redefining the future of the electronics industry in a deglobalized world. For decades, the electronics industry has been measured by its ability to make products smaller, faster, lighter and more affordable. Success was driven by manufacturing scale, supply chain efficiency and relentless engineering innovation. Today, however, the industry stands at a far more defining moment. The next competitive advantage will no longer come from hardware alone. It will come from intelligence.

While deglobalization is reshaping supply chains and geopolitical priorities are redrawing manufacturing maps, an even bigger transformation is unfolding beneath the surface. Artificial Intelligence, particularly Generative AI, is changing the very nature of products,

THE FUTURE ISN'T  
ELECTRONIC.  
**IT'S INTELLIGENT.**

The next competitive advantage  
won't come from hardware alone.



businesses and leadership. The companies that recognise this shift early will shape the industry's future. Those that don't may discover that manufacturing excellence alone is no longer enough.

## **DEGLOBALIZATION HAS CHANGED THE RULES**

Over the past few years, the global electronics industry has experienced one of its biggest structural shifts in decades. Supply chains that once optimised purely for cost are now being redesigned for resilience. Semiconductor sovereignty, regional manufacturing, friend-shoring and diversified sourcing have become boardroom priorities.

This is more than a logistics adjustment. It represents a new business philosophy where continuity often outweighs cost optimisation. The ability to manufacture closer to key markets, secure strategic components and respond quickly to geopolitical disruptions is becoming a competitive differentiator.

Yet while companies focus on where products should be manufactured, a far bigger question deserves equal attention.

## WHAT SHOULD TOMORROW'S PRODUCTS ACTUALLY BECOME?

### Electronics Is Becoming an Intelligence Business

For years, electronics companies competed on product specifications. More memory. Better displays. Faster processors. Longer battery life.

Those parameters will continue to matter, but increasingly they are becoming expected features rather than meaningful differentiators. The new source of value lies elsewhere.

Products are no longer competing on hardware. They are competing on intelligence.

Whether it is a smartphone, medical device, industrial machine, vehicle, television or household appliance, customers increasingly expect products that understand context, learn behaviour, anticipate needs and continuously improve through software and AI.

For decades, electronics made products smarter. Today, AI is making products think. That changes everything.

### The Biggest Transformation Is Inside the Enterprise

Many organisations still approach AI the same way they approached ERP, CRM or Business Intelligence systems.

A technology is evaluated, budgets are approved, vendors are shortlisted and implementation begins.

Generative AI refuses to fit into that model. It cannot simply be purchased. It has to be embraced. The greatest transformation is not technological. It is behavioural. Every employee who works with knowledge, whether designing products, serving customers, negotiating contracts, analysing markets or leading teams, now has access to capabilities that were unimaginable only three years ago.

For the first time in modern business history, a graduate trainee, a design engineer and a CEO have access to the same foundational intelligence. The playing field has been fundamentally reset. The differentiator is no longer access to knowledge.

The differentiator is how effectively people collaborate with intelligent machines.

### Leadership Must Become AI-Native

Perhaps the most important decision facing the electronics industry has very little to do with electronics. It is whether leadership is prepared to change the way it thinks and the way it works. Buying AI solutions will not create intelligent organisations.



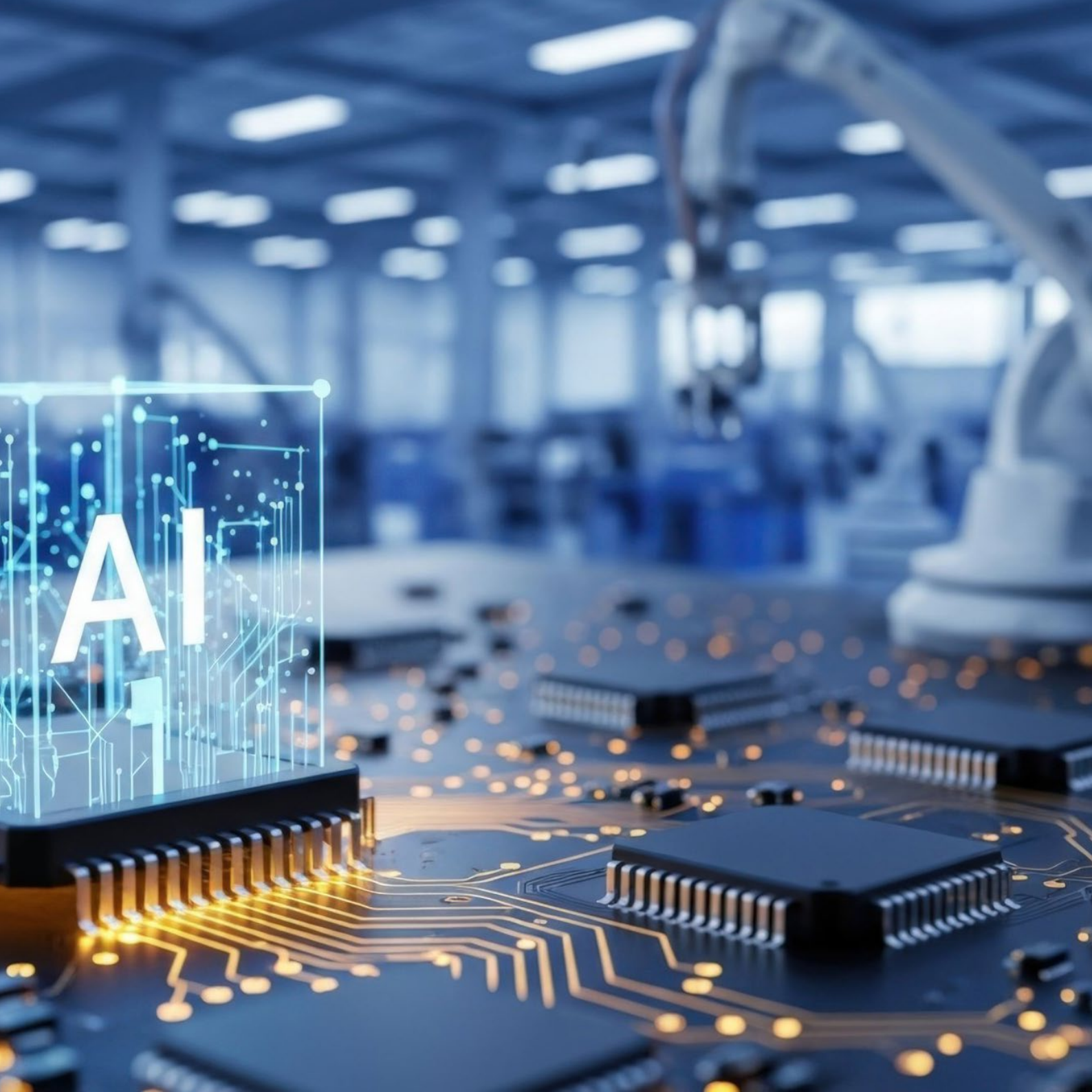
Living with AI every day will.

The leadership teams that will define the next decade are those who personally integrate Generative AI into decision-making, communication, planning, innovation and learning. They will not delegate AI to their technology departments. They will make it part of their own operating rhythm. That cultural shift will cascade across product development, customer engagement, operations, service delivery and innovation. Technology adoption has always been an organisational initiative.

Generative AI begins as a personal commitment.







## THE NEXT COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

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The electronics companies that succeed over the coming decade will not necessarily be those with the biggest factories or the largest product portfolios. They will be the organisations that combine engineering excellence with intelligent decision-making. They will design products that learn. Factories that optimise themselves. Service centres that anticipate customer needs. Supply chains that continuously adapt. Most

importantly, they will build workforces that see AI not as automation, but as amplification.

In a deglobalized world, resilience will remain important. But intelligence will become indispensable. The future of electronics will not be decided by chips alone.

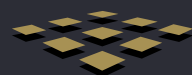
It will be decided by the intelligence embedded within them and by the leaders who choose to embrace that intelligence before their competitors do.

That is the real future of the industry.

And that future has already begun.

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