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TECH

Return of the Razr—With a Foldable Screen and \$1,500 Price

Motorola seeks to revive flip phone that was dethroned by the iPhone a decade ago



The original Motorola Razr was a status symbol touted by celebrities including David Beckham—but by the time he did this promotion in 2007, the iPhone was the hottest new tech in town. PHOTO: JEFF ROBERSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

By Sarah Krouse and Rob Barry

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The Motorola Razr phone is making a comeback. The once-popular flip phone is being revived as a smartphone with a foldable screen and a starting price of roughly \$1,500, according to people familiar with the matter.

The phone's maker, Lenovo Group Inc., [LNVGY -2.72% ▼](#) is partnering with Verizon Communications Inc. on an exclusive deal to begin selling the new Razr devices in the U.S. as soon as February, the people said. The device is still being tested, and the timing of its release isn't yet final and could change.

Lenovo, a Chinese computer maker that bought the Motorola Mobility handset business from Google in 2014, plans to manufacture about 200,000 of the new high-end phones, the people said.

The upgraded Razr is a sign of the wireless industry's quest for niche products that will appeal to consumers increasingly content to hold on to their old smartphones longer as their functions become commoditized.

Motorola first released the ultrathin Razr V3 flip phone in 2004, and it became an overnight status symbol. Models of the phone were advertised by celebrities including Fergie and David Beckham. The company ended up selling more than 130 million units globally.



In 2005, Motorola's chief phone designer Jim Wicks held up the sleek new Razr flip phone with what was then cutting-edge screen technology. PHOTO: JEFF ROBERSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

But Apple Inc.'s introduction of the touch-screen iPhone in 2007 upended the Razr and other best-selling devices from Nokia Corp. and BlackBerry Inc. Motorola's sales fell and losses mounted, prompting the company to adopt Google's Android software in 2009 and sell its cellphone business to Google in 2011.

Motorola has tried to revive the franchise before, including in 2011, when it launched a handset called the Droid Razr with Verizon. But Motorola's share of the U.S. market it once dominated continued to slump. It had 5.9% of U.S. mobile-phone shipments at the end of the third quarter of 2018, according to IDC, down from 27.3% in 2004.

The Razr is part of a product road map for Verizon in 2019 that also includes some of the first smartphones compatible with faster 5G networks to hit the market, such as a version of Samsung Electronics Co.'s Galaxy phone and a Motorola phone with a clip-on modem that enables 5G service.

Motorola isn't the only device maker to experiment with a foldable screen. Samsung plans to launch such a phone early this year, The Wall Street Journal has reported. That phone's price tag also could surpass \$1,500, according to people familiar with the matter.

Lenovo Chief Executive Yang Yuanqing hinted last year that another comeback was possible for the Razr. A patent granted to Motorola Mobility in August depicts a clamshell-style smartphone with a hinge. The patent filing, made in May 2017, describes a flexible screen that folds inward when the device closes but doesn't crease.

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