## Startup Failure Post-Mortems 2020 Second Update (8/18/20)

### Essential Products

Title: [Essential, Andy Rubin’s phone company, is shutting down](https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/12/21134985/essential-phone-shutting-down-andy-rubin-startup)  
Title Link: <https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/12/21134985/essential-phone-shutting-down-andy-rubin-startup>

Product: [Essential Products](https://www.cbinsights.com/company/essential)  
Product Link: <https://www.cbinsights.com/company/essential>

**Consumer hardware startup Essential closed down in February 2020,** following the flop of its Essential Phone launched in 2017 and other unfinished projects. Founded by Andy Rubin, the creator of [Android](https://www.cbinsights.com/company/android), the startup drew significant interest, **raising over $330M.** However, after a 2018 New York Times report revealed that Rubin had allegedly left Google due to sexual misconduct allegations, attention to the startup cooled. According to The Verge,

Essential was in the process of developing another phone called “Project Gem” with an unusual design. Rubin first teased the project in October 2019, but the company now says it has “no clear path to deliver it to customers.”

“Given this, we have made the difficult decision to cease operations and shutdown Essential,” the company writes in a blog post.

# Essential Products

CONSUMER PRODUCTS & SERVICES | Consumer Electronics  
[essential.com](https://essential.com/)

## Founded Year

2015

## Stage

Asset Sale | AssetsPurchased

## Total Raised

$330M

## About Essential Products

Essential Products is a company focused on creating consumer technology products for the 21st century. Founded by Andy Rubin, co-founder of Android, Essential Products is headquartered in Palo Alto, California.

## Essential Products Headquarter Location

380 Portage Avenue

Palo Alto, California, 94306,

United States

650-300-0000

**Essential, Andy Rubin’s phone company, is shutting down The phone startup is done after one flop**  
By Jacob Kastrenakes Feb 12, 2020, 1:19pm EST

Title Link: <https://www.theverge.com/2020/2/12/21134985/essential-phone-shutting-down-andy-rubin-startup>



Photo by Vjeran Pavic / The Verge

Essential is shutting down less than three years after the startup unveiled its first smartphone. The company’s only complete product, [the Essential Phone](https://www.theverge.com/2017/8/18/16165040/essential-phone-review-android-andy-rubin), [sold poorly](https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/12/17004278/essential-phone-2017-sales-90k-units-sold-six-months-post-launch) and received mixed reviews. A follow-up phone [was canceled](https://www.theverge.com/2018/5/24/17391734/essential-cancels-phone-development-considers-sale-report), and a number of other promised devices — like a [smart home assistant](https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2017/5/30/15711258/essential-home-voice-assistant-andy-rubin) and [operating system](https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2017/5/30/15711162/ambient-os-essential-home-andy-rubin) — never materialized.

The startup was founded by Android creator Andy Rubin. While that initially drew hype and investment, it quickly turned backward on the company after [a](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/technology/google-sexual-harassment-andy-rubin.html)*[New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/technology/google-sexual-harassment-andy-rubin.html)*[report](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/25/technology/google-sexual-harassment-andy-rubin.html) drew attention to accusations of sexual misconduct against Rubin that allegedly led to him leaving Google.

Essential was in the process of [developing another phone](https://www.theverge.com/2019/10/8/20905525/andy-rubin-elongated-phone-essential-android) called “Project Gem” with an unusual design. Rubin first teased the project in October 2019, but the company now says it has “no clear path to deliver it to customers.”

“Given this, we have made the difficult decision to cease operations and shutdown Essential,” the company writes in [a blog post](https://www.essential.com/blog/essential-update).

Essential is done issuing updates for the Essential Phone, though it says the device will continue to work. [Newton Mail](https://www.theverge.com/2019/2/5/18212281/essential-newton-mail-app-back-available-ios-android-mac-windows-phone), which Essential [bought in late 2018](https://www.theverge.com/2018/12/7/18130853/essential-cloudmagic-newton-email-app-company), will also be shut down. Essential says it will continue to operate through April 30th.

The news is supposed to have no impact on Playground Global, a VC firm Rubin founded [that shares the same office space](https://www.theverge.com/2019/10/11/20910225/andy-rubin-playground-global-departure-essential-founder-ceo) as Essential, according to an Essential spokesperson. A Playground spokesperson said the firm is “proud to have supported” the team even though “commercial success was elusive.”

When Essential debuted its first phone in 2017, it seemed to have a lot going for it. The device had a premium build quality, the backing of Android’s creator, and a unique nearly all-screen design with a cutout camera notch that hadn’t been seen before.

But the phone’s design very quickly became standard fare — the iPhone X was released just months later, and a wave of notch knock-offs followed. And the Essential Phone itself wasn’t helped by some faults of its own: it was a Sprint exclusive in the US, confining it to the smallest nationwide carrier, and its camera was widely criticized by reviewers.

Essential also promised a wave of accessories for a magnetic module system built into the phone, but only two materialized: a 360-degree camera and a headphone jack adapter, which sold for $149.

Even as the startup struggled with sales and development of new devices, it continued to support its original phone. Six months after launch, [it put out three new color options](https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2018/3/1/17066192/essential-limited-edition-colors-photos-ocean-depths-matte-black-bronze-amazon), and the company continued to regularly update the phone’s software. As recently as September 2019, it was [updated to Android 10](https://www.theverge.com/2019/9/3/20847890/essential-phone-android-10-update-release-day) on day one of the operating system’s release.

Unable to break into the phone market with a traditional device, Essential started developing a much quirkier new device, seemingly hoping to strike a chord with consumers. It was never entirely clear what Project Gem would be good for, though. And apparently, Essential lacked the money — and interest from investors — to get it to market.

**Essential Products**

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products>

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| --- |
| **Essential Products Inc.** |
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| --- | --- |
| **Type** | [Private](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_company) |
| **Industry** | [Technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology) |
| **Founded** | November 9, 2015; 6 years ago |
| **Founders** | * [Andy Rubin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Rubin)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Andy_Rubin_Nears_His_Comeback,_Complete_With_an_%E2%80%98Essential%E2%80%99_Phone-1) * [Matt Hershenson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matt_Hershenson)[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Essential_About_Us-2) |
| **Defunct** | February 12, 2020; 23 months ago |
| **Headquarters** | 380 Portage Avenue,  [Palo Alto, CA](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palo_Alto) 94306  ,  US[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Results_Detail-3) |
| **Key people** | [Niccolo De Masi](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Niccolo_De_Masi&action=edit&redlink=1) ([president](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/President_(corporate_title)) and [chief operating officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_operating_officer))[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Essential_phone:_Interview_with_Niccolo_De_Masi-4) |
| **Products** | [Essential Phone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Phone) Essential Home |
| **Number of employees** | ~100[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Essential_phone:_Interview_with_Niccolo_De_Masi-4) |
| **[Parent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parent_company)** | [Nothing (Technology Company)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nothing_(Technology_Company)) |
| **Website** | [www.essential.com](http://www.essential.com/) (Dead link) |

**Essential Products** (marketed as **Essential**) was an American [technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology) company and manufacturer founded on November 9, 2015, by [Andy Rubin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Rubin) and based in [Palo Alto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palo_Alto,_California). The company developed, manufactured, and sold [Essential Phone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Phone) and accessories for it, including 360 Camera for Essential Phone. The company closed on February 12, 2020, stating that it was developing a new handset, but that there was "no clear path to deliver it to customers".[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:2-5)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:3-6)

History

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:2008_Google_Developer_Day_in_Japan_-_Andy_Rubin.jpg)

Andy Rubin, the founder of Essential

The company was established in [Palo Alto](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palo_Alto,_California) on November 9, 2015, by [Android](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_(operating_system)) co-founder [Andy Rubin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Rubin), with funding from [Playground Global](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playground_Global).[[2]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Essential_About_Us-2)[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Results_Detail-3) In December 2016, Brian Wallace, who left his occupation as [chief marketing officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_marketing_officer) for [Magic Leap](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_Leap) a month prior, was reportedly working with Rubin. Trademarks with the 'Essential' brand name were also filed with the [United States Patent and Trademark Office](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Patent_and_Trademark_Office) that same month.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:0-7)

In January 2017, it was reported that the new company was planning to unofficially reveal a smartphone.[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:1-8) In March, Rubin released an image that teased the unannounced smartphone on his [Twitter](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter) account.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-9) On May 25, the company teased a second image of the smartphone on its Twitter account.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-10) On May 30, the company announced both the smartphone, dubbed the [Essential Phone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Phone), and its [smart speaker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_speaker), Essential Home.[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-11)

In August 2017, it was reported that [Amazon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_(company)), [Tencent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tencent) and [Foxconn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foxconn) have invested in Essential Products.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-12)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-13)

In August 2017, the company was valued as a [unicorn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unicorn_(finance)).[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-14)

On May 25, 2018, the company cancelled its next flagship and was reported to be for sale.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-15)[[16]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-forsale-16)

In December 2018, Essential acquired CloudMagic, owner of the mobile email app [Newton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton_(app)).[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-17)

In October 2019, Essential teased an upcoming replacement for the PH-1 called the 'Gem'. This device would have a much more slender form factor than its predecessor, would rely mostly on voice control, and would utilize advanced AI for processing the voice control input.[[18]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-18)

But, the new product never hit the market, as on February 12, 2020, the company announced that it was ceasing operations because there was "no clear way to deliver ['Gem'] to customers".[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:2-5)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:3-6)

On February 17, 2021, the brand was bought by Carl Pei's Nothing Start up.[[19]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-19)

Products

**Essential Phone**

*Main article: [Essential Phone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Phone)*

[](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Essential_Phone_in_ocean_depths.jpg)

The Essential Phone in "ocean depths" colour

The **Essential Phone** is a phone introduced in 2017. The device is upgradable to [Android 10](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_10), and was only sold in the United States and Canada. The device will not receive any software updates, including security patches, after February 3, 2020, due to the company going out of business.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:3-6)

**Newton Mail**

*Main article: [Newton (app)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton_(app))*

In early 2019 Essential Products acquired CloudMagic, Inc., developers of the [Newton Mail](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton_(app)) app, which shut down in September 2018. Newton Mail restored services shortly after being acquired. Newton shut down on April 30, 2020.[[20]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-20)

**Undelivered Products**

**Project GEM** was a prototype of a second phone developed by Essential Products Inc. It was announced in a company blog post on October 9, 2019[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-21) and cancelled three months later, on February 12, 2020, in coincidence with the shutdown of Essential.[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:2-5)[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-:3-6)

**Essential Home** was a planned [smart speaker](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_speaker) and [smart home hub](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smart_home_hub) running an Essential-designed operating system, named "Ambient OS".[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-22)[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-23) The device launch was planned for late 2017,[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-24)[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-25)[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-26)[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-This_is_the_new_Ambient_OS,_Essential%E2%80%99s_big_bet_to_control_your_home-27)[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essential_Products#cite_note-Andy_Rubin,_creator_of_Android,_debuts_his_new_Essential_Phone-28) however it never arrived on the market.

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