Just A Moment…
IT Commentary

Is GSM Good Enough?

by Leon A. Enriquez

Why is the Internet Protocol (IP) so successful? Although IP was not designed to be the most robust communication protocol, it enables access to information. And it does a good job providing useful information too. IP's success is simple. Because it steers clear of a computing roadblock -- systems compatibility -- it enjoys a dominant position.

So the Net has become a user-friendly open system that is not only easy-to-use but a pervasive communications medium as well. To take advantage of the Internet, all you need to do is to install a Web front-end to your existing application, and then create easy access to your application for a global audience. Many equate the dot-com fever to over-simplifying the Web-enabled experience.

Subscribers of the infocommunications space are asking themselves a question: How do we access the Net using mobile devices? Because of concept of IP everywhere, the telco infrastructures have been optimised to deliver wireless and traditional wireline services over IP-enabled systems and devices.

Today, GSM phone handsets and PDAs can handle text-based applications such as short messaging, telephone directories, e-mail, e-calendars, and diaries quite well. These simple applications keep mobile people connected as they move about. But there are restrictions to the type of data streams that can be channeled to such mobile devices.

For instance, WAP (wireless application protocol) is making the delivery of data on-the-move to mobile devices a reality in a cost-effective way. Providing Internet and Web-based services on a wireless data network presents obvious challenges to the service provider, application developer and hardware manufacturer. Beyond the apparent bandwidth limitations, there are many restrictions that need to be overcome before WAP can deliver the promise of a rich multimedia experience over the wireless space.

Functionality of such wireless computing devices need to be made easier-to-use than say the desktop PC. Why? Compared to sitting in front of a PC, mobile users cannot be expected to stay focused on the mobile handset because they work in a dynamic environment. Cost of such mobile devices is another important consideration that impact the penetration rates.

In order to proliferate, the solutions must value-add while maintaining the entry level at a low cost for the handheld device. Furthermore, users often expect the performance of the mobile data application to be quick and instantaneous. Another constraint is that wireless data networks tend to provide less connection stability, and unpredictable availability compared to fixed wireline networks.

Consider that with the growth of new platforms such as UMTS, it unclear whether GSM has a bright future. However, the huge installed base means that GSM can last at least a few more years down the road. Any competing standard must provide a compelling advantage -- before its adoption becomes significant enough to displace the incumbent standard -- in this case, GSM.

Reflect on how quickly the POTS analogue systems are being superceded by their digital counterparts, and you will see where the change agents are emerging with digital networks. The trends seem to point to the early extinction of the old as new and more effective technologies emerge.

One fact is true. Lifecycles in the communications industry are getting shorter. GSM must evolve quickly to deliver the rich content and solutions over the wireless space if it is to prevail.

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