

Islander January 2007 Technology Update

Technical predictions for 2007

Mobile phones

In early 2007 we are expecting the next smart phone from Nokia, the Nokia 95, a mobile handset which also does video, has a 5MP camera to picture tag points of interest via the GPS, has a screen with enough hi-res to display legible street names, can play music, has Wi-Fi, HSDPA, 3G and Bluetooth and, and, and However, the 2006 Nokia N80, which is the current top-end Finnish fiendish piece of technology, is still not a regular on the street. This only has a 3MP camera, but has 3G and Wi-Fi but no HSDPA.

The must-have Motorola RAZR has been reborn as the Moto KRZR K1 for 2007 with a thinner waist, 2MP camera and host of other features which you never knew you needed. Finally Motorola have even improved their menu software.

Another novelty for 2007 will be dedicated phone-based GPS navigation systems which will outperform anything for getting you through traffic. Vodafone are planning to use information from the company's network to monitor traffic queues. They have realized that a traffic jam is actually just a huge batch of slow-moving mobile phones looking for a market opportunity. So, the GPS navigator will be fed with live traffic congestion data – very clever.

3G or not 3G, that is the question

Many predicted that GPRS, referred to initially as 2.5G, which was an interim service until the full 3G (UMTS) came online would be a damp squib, and that 3G would arrive so late that it would be swamped by Wi-Fi. Well, it wasn't. Wi-Fi is limited due to poor coverage, so the range is effectively limited. In the latter half of 2006, 3G grew up into HSDPA. We now have 2Mbps data speed on mobile phones in many 3G areas, which is scheduled to rise to 7-8Mbps in the next few years.

The above paragraph was written for my techno-nerd reader. For everyone else, this means that currently with a HSDPA mobile phone you can surf the net much faster than you could previously using a 3G mobile phone, and you can do this in many more places than you can use Wi-Fi.

In 2007, get ready for Wi-Max. It's been in use already for a couple of years but this year it will provide strong competition for 3G and HSDPA. It is the new Wi-Fi technology, and can achieve serious speed of up to 70Mbps. This combined with its wide range looks set to connect communities, such as the entire Bay of Palma, with one giant wireless station.

VSAT

VSAT for yachts will mature during 2007. Gradually we are seeing the separation of the men from the boys within the service providers. The quality of the service from certain service providers is stabilising and support is improving. There will be an increase in open ocean coverage to include the north Atlantic, following the coverage of the north Pacific during 2006, courtesy of the failed Connections by Boeing. There are some minor improvements to the antenna with wide band LNBS and improved rotary joints, but nothing too exciting. New services will become available over the VSAT such as IP TV. MTN are already broadcasting Fox News to cruise ships. We predict that being able to use your mobile phone on board, wherever the yacht is, via the VSAT will really take off during 2007 as more bi-lateral roaming agreements are put in place.

Inmarsat – Fleet broadband

We may see what is becoming known as Fleet Broadband by the end of the year. Otherwise known as BGAN, this is the Inmarsat upgrade to their current Fleet systems. It will provide a maximum data bandwidth of about 300Kbps, anywhere in the world, apart from the poles and currently not the Pacific as the new satellite hasn't been launched yet. However the section of the market that will be interested in Fleet Broadband are the sailing yachts that sail far and wide. The antenna is small and it will work everywhere in the world that an adventurous sailing yacht may want to go.

Microsoft Vista and On-line Office

Vista is the new ambitious operating system upgrade from Microsoft. If you need an excuse to buy an over-powerful PC, then this is it. It has been five years in development and promises to be very easy to use, with many, many additional features. Towards the middle of the year Microsoft intend to create slimmed down versions of Word and Excel that will simply work over a web browser and the processing part will be done elsewhere. This is similar to Google's Writely wordprocessing idea.

Entertainment gadgeteria

What can we expect in 2007? I have come across PC game enhancement gadgets that, in addition to sound, will emit flashes of lights like muzzle shots, blow wind in your face, smell of cordite – all to help your virtual experience. I wonder whether virtual pain is under development?

Blu-Ray or HD-DVD? I wonder whether by this time next year we will know who is the winner of this format war? And will we care? Well I will, as I am currently planning to upgrade my DVD system at home, and don't want to waste my money on the wrong kit. Who loses out? Not the manufacturers, but Joe Public, who has already paid for his kit. Towards the end of this year there will be dual format drives out from NEC and LG. Warner are also planning to launch a dual I-function disc which can be read by both Blu-Ray and HD-DVD players.

3D TVs from Philips, Samsung and Toshiba are due in the shops in 2007. With the Philips you will not need to wear huge specs. I understand that between the start of the UK sales on 26th December and 1st January, a flat screen TV was being purchased every 20 seconds. I witnessed this madness first hand in John Lewis in Kingston on 27th December where there was 20-25% off all flat screen TVs! The question is, should you really join the rush and buy one now, when it will soon be replaced by the 3D version? Or should you wait until the Mitsubishi laser TV is launched at the end of 2007? They are half the weight of a plasma TV, and throw a clearer brighter image onto a screen made of plastic, instead of layered glass. They use much less power and will cost about the same.

So what do we do? Sit on the fence, or go ahead and make that purchase? My recommendation, on behalf of my company, is that you just keep on buying more and more technology!

Wishing everyone a technologically enhanced 2007.

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