



Islander May 2009 Technology Update

What's in the News, What's New and Some Nonsense

After my struggle last month, during Antigua Classic Week, to get enthused about technology I have become well and truly re-immersed in the subject since returning to Mallorca, and have loads of topics to report on.

Water Balloon New Development

So, my first fascinating update this month is the new development in water balloon slinging technology. A new model just launched will sling a water balloon up to 100m in the air with devastating consequences when it returns to earth!

However, before going any further in relation to this fascinating technology there are some interesting, serious, and I suppose to some, potentially dull, technology news items this month.

Inmarsat buys Stratos

Inmarsat has completed the acquisition of Stratos, the single largest supplier of its own satellite airtime to the maritime market, in a deal that could have far-reaching long term effects on the satellite communications market.

Inmarsat has, until now, operated as a wholesaler of satellite airtime, by selling to Distribution Partners, who in turn act as retailers and sell via dealers or direct with the end user. As such, Inmarsat has had no direct influence over the sale and pricing of its services to the shipping and yacht market maritime users. However, Stratos is its largest Distribution Partner for Inmarsat services, meaning that Inmarsat is now a wholesaler that has total control and ownership of its largest retailer. This situation is bound to make its other independent, competing Distribution Partners a little nervous!

In response to these concerns, Inmarsat has introduced new distribution agreements, and is keen to point out that the existing management will continue to run Stratos independently, and the only contact will be at corporate level.

Inmarsat has also announced that they are one step closer to completing the development of their much heralded Inmarsat global satellite hand-held phone. They have appointed an Indian company, Sasken Communication Technologies, to complete the development.

New KU band VSAT North Atlantic Ocean Coverage Imminent

Transponder space on the recently launched Telesat T11N satellite has been snapped up by a number of VSAT providers including

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MTN. By the time you read this, the service may well be active. By the end of this month MTN should be able to provide continuous VSAT coverage between the Med and the Caribbean, thus simplifying and reducing the yacht's communication costs.

Farsounder launch new long range sonar.

The Farsounder Forward Looking Sonar system is a 3D, colour sonar that we have installed on a number of yachts. Farsounder have just announced its latest system with the launch of the FS-3ER, which operates to a range of 800m to 1,000m from a yacht with an operational speed of 25 knots.

The sonar technology generates a 3-dimensional image of the sea floor and in-water objects with a single ping, offering a 60 to 90 degree field of view.

We are arranging a live demo of the Farsounder system in Rotterdam on June 25th or 26th for those who are seriously interested. Please contact us for further details.

Blackberry Curve outsells iPhone

We hear from Reuters that, according to research group NPD, the BlackBerry Curve moved past Apple's iPhone in the first-quarter to become the best-selling consumer smartphone in the US. RIM, the manufacturer of Blackberry, which already dominates the corporate smartphone market in the US, also had three of the top five best-selling consumer smartphones in the period, with the Storm at number three and the Pearl at number four. According to the company, more than half of RIM's 25 million subscribers now fall into the non-corporate category.

Struggling Sony Ericsson may need owner rescue plan

This cell phone handset joint venture is burning up cash as it runs up losses. Last month the company reported a first-quarter pre tax loss of EUR358 million after sales dropped 36 percent from the year earlier. A 35 percent fall in handset shipments saw its market share plunge to 5.9 percent, ranking it as the fifth-largest global handset vendor. According to an FT article, Sony Ericsson's president, Dick Komiyama, now admits his target for the group to become the world's third-largest handset maker by 2011 might not be met until 2012.

Sony and Ericsson are reportedly preparing for the possibility of having to secure new financing, with analysts speculating each could have to make a capital injection of EUR500 million before the end of the year.

Last month Komiyama said he was confident of turning the company around and returning to profitability with the launch of

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new products. Sony Ericsson is hoping to begin selling at least two new smartphones by the end of this year - a market it has failed to break into - and a third early in 2010, using a variety of operating systems such as Symbian, Android and Windows Mobile.

A gaggle of green cell phone chargers

What is the collective noun for a group of phone chargers? We now have a stable of green cell phone chargers for you. Two of them are a little confusing, as one works if you have wind and the other is a wind up model! The third, which I mentioned in this column last year, is a solar model.

If you need to charge your mobile but find yourself without electricity, then you now have every option.

The wind up charger has a handle. Turn it vigorously for a few minutes and the charger creates enough energy to power your mobile for 25-30 minutes. It also has a handy inbuilt extra flashlight to help you do it in the dark, when the sun doesn't shine and there is no wind! Sounds like it would have been useful on our last camping holiday...

The wind-powered charger is a small, lightweight, portable, universal power unit that stores wind energy in its rechargeable lithium polymer battery. The idea is to place the mini wind fan on your bike, yacht bimini or arm to allow the wind to catch the fan and charge the built-in rechargeable battery. Then simply plug it into a mobile phone whenever the battery is low for instant power.

There are a number of solar versions available now, usually to be found in the shops in airport departure lounges. They usually require a lid to be flipped to expose an efficient monocrystalline cell solar panel which when exposed to the sun will charge a rechargeable lithium polymer battery again. The operation couldn't be simpler, as you don't need to have your phone connected and cooked in the sun. You can leave it charging the battery all day and then connect it to your phone overnight to charge the phone from the battery.

So, what about the water balloon launching systems?

The sling itself is some new high-tensile contraption, which requires three adults to manipulate. Two hold each end of the new high tensile stuff, and the third pulls it back and takes aim. Care is required as you have to avoid launching the "aimer" into orbit, so make sure he's a hefty bloke. The water balloons are just the same as old water balloons. The end result is a full on way to rain a watery hell on your foes, or to hurt yourself, your friends and maybe a few unsuspecting birds.



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