

Islander February 2008 Technology Update

The very latest in Mobile Communications Technology (and brochures) from the GSMA World Congress

The GSMA World Congress, held in Barcelona from 11th -14th February, is the world's premier wireless event, featuring all the traditional movers and shakers in the mobile phone industry, as well as new entrants from the worlds of the internet, entertainment and broadcasting.

There were over 1,600 exhibitors showcasing their new products including several handset manufacturers, service providers, application providers, billing systems providers and content providers (more on this last item later). This extraordinary international show is held each year, and is spread throughout the vast Montuic exhibition halls at Plaza España, Barcelona. There is no other mobile event in the world that has such a breadth of content and calibre of participants, which is probably why there were 2,300 members of the media present at the show.

The GSM Association is the global trade association of the world's GSM operators.

It is clearly impossible to see the whole event in one day, so all I can do is provide a "first impressions" report. My first target was to review the new handsets being launched this year by all the manufacturers. Apple with the i-Phone was notable by their absence but every other manufacturer had hundreds of new handsets on display on their booths, and almost every rep had a handset in each pocket, all attached by spring loaded security strings like miniature dog leads.

Every manufacturer now has multiple product ranges to fit various different vertical markets.

Does your handset Ring Ring, or is it just Bling Bling?

The first and most obvious target vertical market is for the client who likes the idea of their handset being part of their couture or their costume jewellery. LG has joined forces with Prada to produce a whole range of designer handsets, all displayed in a glass case in the style of an upmarket jeweller. Samsung has formed a strategic partnership with fashion icon Giorgio Armani to produce a line of mobile products. I caught view of a solid gold RAZR on the Motorola booth with matching clutch bag. This was accompanied by a serious piece of bling - a diamond encrusted Bluetooth earpiece designed to look like a pair of earrings! Nokia is offering two new collections, 7900 Prism and the 8800 Premium Collection. They are described as "intriguing, fashionable and elegant" and "created for people who have a taste for finer things". A little understated, and perhaps not quite so bling as the others!

Aesthetics and styling

The statement here I believe is "cool" rather than "bling". It is subtle, but there is clearly another target market that is driven by style and design at the cost of functionality or performance. This market is pretty much dominated by the i-Phone as it looks good, it has a cool name, the user interface is excellent, but its functionality is poor. Samsung's flagship launch was their Ultra edition Soul

handsets. This is a slider-type handset with an eye-catching touch panel under the display. The panel displays navigation icons which change according to the current application being run on the handset. For example, in camera mode, icons such as zoom and brightness appear, while music player functions appear in music mode. The case, as in a lot of the cool handsets, is brushed stainless steel. However, that's enough of the designer chat, let's get on with the really important stuff...

Entertainment

Every manufacturer produces a range of handsets which perform entertainment functions, and some specialize more in this market than others. The most experienced in this market is Sony Ericsson, who won first place in the GSMA World Congress Awards for their 2007 W910 Walkman handset. It is designed for entertainment; whether that be music, 3D games, video, or high-speed Web access, and is geared to let you choose your music, your way. SensMe™ enables you to search your collection and create play lists based on tempo and style rather than on artist or album. Shake control shuffles your play list. PlayNow™ V4.0 lets you preview or pre-listen to a variety of media content and then buy it over-the-air if you wish. TrackID™ - in collaboration with Gracenote® - will identify a music track and show you the track name, artist and album. All this comes free, although data charges may apply. The Sony Ericsson W910 Walkman® handset is single-band UMTS/HSDPA, quad-band EDGE handset. The new handset they launched on their booth to replace the W910 for 2008 is the W980. Look out for this, as it is faster and better! As mentioned other manufacturers launched new handsets such as the Nokia 5310 and 5610 XpressMusic, described as a Mini Music Powerhouses with the ultimate mix of music and style.

The new top end Nokia N96 is an all round entertainment package. It has 16Gb of memory to store 40 hours of video or 12,000 songs. You can watch live TV and videos with a convenient little "kickstand" for hands-free viewing. Saves you from getting serious arm and shoulder strain from watching 40 hours of video on your handset!

Live TV using DVB-H technology on handsets was available on considerably more handsets this year. The main criticism of this service is that the TV content available is poor, and thus the uptake on this technology is slow.

Mapping

With our business being primarily in marine electronics, we have many years of experience in electronic charting systems and GPS technology. In recent years, what was well established in the marine world has become available on land for car navigation with dedicated navigators and mobile handsets. The launch for 2008 is pedestrian navigation on mobile handsets. On the new Nokia N96 they are launching Nokia Maps 2.0 which allows pedestrian navigation. This eliminates one way streets and adds in footpaths, pedestrian subways and bridges. Nokia's mapping company is resurveying the world to add this additional data into their cartography. At that expense, I guess they must be predicting a significant demand!

For all the above applications, watching TV or video and navigation, a good size screen is really essential. The Nokia N96 screen size has been increased in comparison to the N95, but is it enough for comfortable viewing?

Content

Each handset manufacturer was keen to sell their content services as the best thing since sliced bread. Content is a bit of a mystery to most of us. It basically describes anything which your handset can do apart from those services described above, and includes mainly internet type services.

These content services cover all sorts of unusual and new activities which, I must admit, I've never found necessary. Am I beginning to sound like an old git? I was given a very enthusiastic demonstration of how, with a particular handset, I could take a photo of a daffodil with its 5M pixel camera, automatically attach the latitude and longitude from the built in GPS, as well as time, date and my comments and then, miraculously, at the touch of a single button, I could send this to all my friends and my Fotolog, position it on a Google Map, and invite all my friends to post their own comments... I couldn't help thinking, "But why?".

Am I alone in thinking there is a Catch 22 situation developing here for our children? If you have to spend most of your life behind the screen of a computer, or using your mobile handset, sending stuff to your friends and asking for their comments, then how do you have enough time to make those friends in the first place? I ventured to suggest this to my girls the other night and received that deflating response "blah blah blah", which roughly translated meant that of course this is all useful and great fun, and they're much faster at using all this technology anyway. They're probably right, again!

But does it make phone calls?

Anyway, it all helps sell handsets to all market sectors. I have made a conscious effort to use the term "handset" so far, but I would just like to add that all these new handsets do also make phone calls.

I am only scratching the surface. I could go on and on. From everything that we saw, my colleagues and I selected our Favourite Accessory and Favourite Brochure. Winner in the Favourite Accessory category was the solar phone charger, which we thought was particular suitable for all of us here in the sun, and in the Brochure category last year's winner Sony Ericsson repeated their success with their extravagant pop-up brochure.

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For any answers, questions or information on any of the above, please contact us.

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