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Blending Of Voice, Data, Video Opens Door For New Services

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OF DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

NEW ORLEANS -- The major mobile-phone makers are driving home the notion of blending voice, data and video content into one device, opening the door for other companies to bring an onslaught of novel services to the cell phone.

Sure, major players such as Nokia Corp. (NOK), Motorola Inc. (MOT) and Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd. (005930.SE) made their presence felt at this year's CTIA Wireless trade show here with sprawling booths showcasing their latest innovations. But smaller players really bought into this year's theme of convergence as mobile phones took on a host of unique uses.

Philips Semiconductor, a unit of Philips Electronics NV (PHG), showed off a home-entertainment center controlled via the cell phone. Those afraid of missing the latest episode of "The O.C." can tell their digital video recorder to record the show over the phone. Users can also send their photos wirelessly to their personal video recorder for later viewing on the television, or use a phone to call up pictures stored in the PVR.


Eastman Kodak Co. (EK) is looking to make the camera phone an easier tool to use. It introduced a concept printer with a cell-phone docking station, allowing for the same one-button ease of use its digital cameras now enjoy. The docking station eliminates the need for a computer.

"People want convenience, and if they can disconnect from the computer, they will," said Chief Executive Daniel Carp at Monday's keynote presentation.

Mobot, a Lexington, Massachusetts technology company, is also looking to expand the use of camera phones from just capturing subjects to interacting with them. The company's visual search and recognition technology allows a user to snap a photo of an advertisement or CD cover and within minutes, receive tailored offers, samples or discounts from the advertisers. For instance, a consumer could take a picture of their favorite musician, send the picture along to Mobot, and get samples of the CD and the option to buy ringtones.

One of the headliners at the show was the world's first 7-megapixel camera phone, unveiled by Samsung. The camera phone is comparable to the high-end digital cameras in the market. Samsung couldn't say when it would be available in the U.S.

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The South Korean electronics company also showcased a phone that could record up to four hours of video, which also isn't available in the U.S. yet. LG Electronics Inc. (066570.SE), on the other hand, has a camera phone that can record up to half an hour of video; it will be available in the next few months. LG also showcased another phone with built-in stereo speakers to better utilize its ability to play digital music.

With the advent of video and music content on mobile phones, one company wants to help parents protect their children from inappropriate content. Boston Communications Group Inc.'s (BCGI) Mobile Guardian Filter can look at the data being streamed into a phone and determine whether it's acceptable depending on the parents' preference. Parents can set a limit for the number of calls or minutes used or who their kids can call. On the enterprise side, it can prevent the ability to download ringtones or check sports scores.

Start-up WaveMarket says its technology can connect friends through its Crunkie service, which allows users to locate each other and share location-tagged blog posts on their cell phones. The technology has piqued the interest of heavy-hitter Qualcomm Inc. (QCOM), which is providing funding to the company.

While most of CTIA was about partnering with the carriers, at least one company thinks its product can take on the traditional phone companies with its fixed wireless terminal. Sprint Corp. (FON) is market-testing the device, which replaces the home landline with a cellular signal. The terminal has a large antenna, which allows for a better signal than a typical mobile phone but a slightly lower quality signal than a traditional line. The product is more popular overseas, especially in areas where there aren't fixed lines available.

HSDPA, or high-speed download packet access, is what industry players said is the answer to the EV-DO standard, which powers Verizon Communications' (VZ) VCAST video service. LG, Siemens AG (SI), Lucent Technologies Inc. (LU) and Qualcomm were among the exhibitors showing off the technology's capabilities. The technology allows for laptops to be connected to a high-speed network wherever a cellular signal is available.

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