

Wireless Wanders

Wanderings in the world of wireless (and elsewhere)

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3G mobile video still underused - but gateways open new opportunities

The most underused feature of 3G is video-calling, but why? It is interesting that there was an expectation that video calling would be popular on 3G phones. Of course, as we all know, it was a flop. There are all kinds of reasons. However, a key problem with mobile video, which also extends to other services, such as push-to-talk (PTT), is the lack of privacy.

In order to use video, or PTT, the user needs to hold the device away from their ear! This creates the immediate problem of how to hear the audio. This is solved by a speaker. At this point, the whole conversation now becomes audible to others, which poses a major problem for most users. One of the reasons that texting is so popular is that it is so discrete. We all know that kids will sit next to their parents and hold texting conversations with friends that they normally wouldn't dare to do within parental earshot. Adults will hold texting sidebar conversations in meetings, allowing them to be quite two-faced in front of peers and managers.

There are other reasons for the failure of both videophony and PTT, especially within the consumer realm, but this aspect of its usability is important. However, when it comes to viewing 3rd party video content, the problem doesn't exist, although using headphones improves the aural experience. There are lots of potential for H2C (human to content) mobile video services, and this is where the massively underused video calling feature of the 3G network can still be exploited.

The best thing about mobile videophony is that it is one of those rare times when the mobile experience, at least from a usability point of view, is far superior to the desktop experience. With videophony, there is no camera to install, there are no drivers to install, there are no settings to configure and - *most important of all for a mobile service* - no client to install! It is as easy as dialing a number and pointing the camera. Using 3G video gateway products, such as [Dilithium Networks](#), enables a 3G video call to be converted to an RTSP video stream, which means going from the telco network into the IP realm is easy. And - big bonus - you don't need an IMS network to do it!

What is starting to happen is that the same aggregator companies offering hosted SMS gateways are now getting into the video gateway business, such as [MX Telecom](#). This means that users can dial a short code, which could be the same as a text short code, and make a video call, the content being nailed straight through to a web-based service. Dilithium Networks demonstrated this quite a while back.

The advantages of this approach to “uploading” video are that it requires no handset configuration or client and that it is instant. Moreover, it uses the circuit-switched resources of the network, so the video response and quality is guaranteed every time. The only downside is that the circuit bandwidth is relatively low (64kbps) and so the resulting video quality is poor. However, this is the YouTube age where kids don’t seem to mind watching grainy videos. For a large category of user-generated-content services, circuit switched will do fine. I’m still not sure why more service providers (e.g. Google) haven’t jumped at the chance to exploit this capability. Then again, if no aggregator exists to offer the gateway service, it means that the provider has to go negotiate with an operator to connect a gateway to their network - and one for each network too! Never mind the revenue agreement!

Nonetheless, we should expect to see more video short codes becoming available across the networks. The whole “dial-a-clip” video service (as I used to call it in seminars) has lots of potential. During my time running the Mashing Room for Motorola, we looked at using video gateways tied to location to create some interesting mash-ups around UGC video.

Technorati Tags: [3G](#), [push-to-talk](#), [videophony](#), [video gateway](#), [Dilithium Networks](#), [user-generated-content](#), [video short codes](#), [mash-ups](#)

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One Response to “3G mobile video still underused - but gateways open new opportunities”

[Marwan Jabri](#) Says:
[February 10th, 2008 at 5:48 am](#)

Video value added services via video calling and short codes also offers the simplest access methods to users. With video codecs such as H.264 on the way to handsets, this will offer a “HD”-like video experience. I invite you to the Dilithium booth at the MWC-2008 (Hall 2 Stand 2G33) to see the latest video value added services that are being or about to be deployed around the world. You can also see why the Dilithium ViVAS video platform has been short listed by the MWC for best SDP award.

I also want to make the comment that peer-to-peer video services (regardless of the access technology, circuit or packet) are subject to two common barriers in emerging mobile technologies - handset penetration/mobile coverage, and subscriber awareness. If you have a handset penetration of 10% and network coverage of 50%, the probability of a video call to complete (called party to answer call) is 5%. So privacy issues and hearing the voice are certainly important issues, but I think they are not the central issues for large uptake of the video calling service.

On the other hand, as you indicate, video value added services (e.g. short-code access to video services) are not subject to either privacy issues nor to call completion issues, and that’s why I believe that such services are getting much more traction and will continue to do so.