

# Mobile World Congress

**Somewhat surprisingly, mobile TV was again a hot topic at this year's show, with delegates in an upbeat mood on prospects for 2008, finds Goran Nastic**

**T**he message sounded familiar: "This will be the year for mobile TV". But two key events may actually help this prophecy come true. As major sporting events before it, the Beijing Olympic Games and the Euro 2008 football tournament could help finally kick-start the market. Of course, spectrum and business model issues, which have contributed to the bumpy road so far will persist, but there is nothing like sports content to get the industry, and to some extent consumers, excited. 3 Italia signed on some half a million users for its nascent DVB-H service as a result of the 2006 football World Cup.

Both Germany and France will have live DVB-H networks by the end of the year, and a total of 20 networks are expected to go commercial by the end of 2008. France sees mobile TV as a strategic element of creating a connected society, while the German city of Bremen recently issued a licence to Mobile 3.0 to launch its DVB-H service before the start of Euro 2008. Bremen follows the awarding of licences in other German states. The Mobile 3.0 consortium brings together both the public and the main commercial broadcasters, ARD and ZDF, RTL, Vox, Sat.1, Pro Sieben, N-TV and N24.

Peter MacAvock of the DVB Group was a little more pragmatic. He sees DVB-H as only one part of a wider scheme making DTV widely available worldwide, and it is a message that often gets lost. He is also not so upbeat on DVB-H taking off this year, but sees 2010 as a more realistic date.

While the DVB-H ecosystem once again dominated proceedings, there were refreshing demonstrations of alternative technologies, including ISDB-T, CMMB, WiMAX, DVB-T and even good old analogue-based mobile TV. Whether this plethora of standards is good for the market is another question entirely.



Siano and Irdeto were among the IC and CA vendors demonstrating broad integration with a number of models and standards, including China's CMMB, which looks set to dominate the mobile broadcast market in the country.

UDcast demonstrated the viability of TV over WiMAX. The company has already adapted its IP encapsulators to this effect, and anticipates commercial WiMAX-based TV services in the first half of 2009.

Telegent is carving itself a nice little niche through its support for legacy broadcast standards. Telegent likes to boast that it has shipped five million chips since the same launch date as the iPhone, for a 1.4% attachment rate. It has some 25 customers in emerging markets, as well as Mediterranean countries, and can be found in some 50 handset models.

The company's mantra is that "content is king with TV", hardly a disruptive opinion, but the point is that mobile TV shouldn't try to change consumer behaviour. It is convenience that drives adoption and one only need look at the Japanese market, where every phone shipping in Japan has ISDB-T embedded, for a total of 20m handsets by YE2008. Telegent also argues that by 2012 only 12% of the globe will be affected by the digital switchover, meaning that there are ample opportunities in analogue broadcasts.

Indeed, Vodafone recently announced it will launch smartphones with DVB-T on the German market, able to receive existing

DTT broadcasts. But while the FTA model has certainly been successful in Japan and South Korea, it isn't one that has so readily translated to Western Europe. With analogue in particular, quality issues fall short by any criteria and the lack of a return path means that operator support is lukewarm at best.

## Convergence

A compelling story came from NDS, which isn't particularly interested in mobile TV as a vertical business because it doesn't see services commercially viable in stand-alone mode. Neither advertising nor subscription based models justify its existence; the usage simply isn't high enough (15-20 minutes on average a day). So NDS is taking a cross-platform approach, as part of a multi-network strategy. This is borne out of the fact that over half of its customers are talking about multi-platform operations, and NDS wants to position itself as an enabler of interoperability across systems.

Underlying this is the VideoGuard Unified Headend, an end-to-end solution that allows operators to run mobile TV, satellite and Web TV using one platform, and all with a common look and feel, particularly relevant as the industry moves towards a hybrid and quad-play models.

NDS claims it supports all current and future DVB-H profiles, at no additional cost.

The convergence theme was continued by Thomson, which is expanding its mobile TV headends and its SmartVision service platform/VoD servers to support 3G solutions for mobile TV, including live video streaming, on-demand and format repurposing. The server can be used to deliver VoD streams to mobile devices, PCs and set-top boxes. The end result is that Thomson's solution can simultaneously manage broadcast, unicast and on demand mobile TV to the same handsets with a unified ESG for 3G/DVB-H services. **CSI**