

The dawn of a new era in mobility

Heinz Stephan,

Comztek Consumer Electronics business unit director

Mobility has come of age. We all thought that the introduction of the notebook would make us more mobile, yet many of us still spend most of our time working on our notebook at our desks. However, a new dawn has arrived with the advent of smart phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs), which mimic the accessibility and processing power of a computer close enough to make portability a realisation.

Mobile devices have evolved from text-based systems with limited application ability. Over the past two years, the radical move by cellular phone manufacturers to turn mobile phones into portable computers has increased the availability of applications on mobile phones, which were previously limited to desktop or notebook computers.

Today, applications are being developed with mobile technology in mind. Many portable software systems are fully compatible with mobile devices.

Other factors causing a mobile revolution include the evolution in processor design, performance and the operating systems that mobile devices run on. Plus, content delivery to mobile devices is now customised to the specific device. All of this is making mobile devices easier to use.

Also, a previous impediment to productive portability was the speed of connectivity. However, the introduction of 3G and HSDPA has solved this challenge.

In addition, companies are spending more time ensuring they have backend infrastructure in place to facilitate mobile

users. Most company network infrastructure has matured. With the correct network infrastructure in place and improved broadband infrastructure, companies are finding it easier to link mobile devices to the network through the Internet and virtual private networks.

As a result, employees that spend the majority of their time on the move now have a greater ability to source and productively use the content on their company's network.

Does this mean the end to the notebook, or even the desktop? Not really. Although much of business and transacting today is done via e-mail and on the Internet, it will be some time before these mobile devices replace the notebook or desktop. There are still some challenges to be ironed out.

Some applications, however smart, are extremely difficult to deliver to mobile devices in a true user-friendly interface due to the interface size. Also, the user interface will remain a limiting factor when it comes to running larger business productivity applications.

So, while the readiness of cellular providers to capture a significant proportion of the data market and the consequent reduction in the cost of accessing data through a mobile device is driving market growth, a smart phone or PDA will not replace a computer.

However, these devices hold great potential. They already assist in productivity by allowing us to communicate in a number of ways more quickly. And the promise of the PDA as an intelligent device, utilising connectivity to best advantage, is something to look forward to.