

Analysis: S. Korea going ubiquitous

December 1 2005

South Korea launched the world's first terrestrial mobile TV service on Thursday, marking another major step toward creating a ubiquitous network society.

The country's four major local broadcasting companies -- MBC, SBS, KBS and YTN -- began transmitting the service, dubbed terrestrial digital multimedia broadcasting (DMB), that enables users to watch TV anywhere, anytime.

In a joint celebration, the two major broadcasting companies demonstrated live programs from deep underground subway stations and on top of a high mountain to mark a big step toward the ubiquitous information society.

Terrestrial DMB, the locally developed technology, allows customers to view real-time digital television programs with CD-quality audio and video via cell phones, laptop computers, in-car terminals, MP3 players and mobile phones.

The channels are offering information on shopping, weather, entertainment and transportation. The service based on over-the-air frequencies is free of charge, unlike the satellite-based DMB that costs at least \$13 a month.

In a congratulatory message, President Roh Moo-hyun predicted the market could grow to \$11.6 billion in the next five years, expressing hopes that South Korea would develop DMB as one of the country's key

next-generation industries.

"DMB will also help invigorate the country's digital contents industry," Roh said in the message. DMB will help turn the country into "Ubiquitous Korea," he said, noting that European countries recently adopted South Korea's standards for DMB.

The land-based mobile television service is available in the Seoul metropolitan area before being expanded nationwide next year. Two smaller start-ups, U1 Media and Korea DMB, will join the terrestrial mobile TV service in February 2006.

The state-run Electronics and Telecommunications Research Institute forecasts the land-based mobile TV service will attract 1.5 million subscribers by next year and exceed 10 million by 2010.

The launch of terrestrial DMB service comes seven months after satellite DMB premiered commercially in South Korea in May, for the first time in the world, with over 100,000 subscribers. The service is enabled by signals beamed from satellites.

According to TU Media, the sole operator of satellite digital multimedia services in South Korea, the number of subscribers has increased to 300,000 subscribers as of the end of November. TU Media is 30-percent owned by SK Telecom Co., South Korea's largest mobile operator.

South Korean handset makers have already rolled out diverse cell phones enabling users to view mobile TV programs.

The country's technology giants, Samsung Electronics Co. and LG Electronics Inc., are dominating the DMB handset market, which is estimated to grow to \$1.35 billion in 2010, according to market experts.

Samsung Electronics has unveiled nine terrestrial DMB handsets, including seven portable media players, aiming to secure more than 50 percent of the market at home and abroad next year. The company developed the world's first chip for cell phones that will be used for land-based DMB services in June 2004.

Last week LG Electronics launched the world's first personal data assistant that can receive and display broadcasts by terrestrial TV service providers.

The companies hope the dominance in the local market will lead to brisk exports to overseas markets, including the United States, Europe and China.

"Many countries that are considering mobile television service are showing great interest in Korea's DMB," said Yu Byoung-youl, senior vice president of Samsung's digital video business, at a news conference in Seoul.

"Samsung Electronics is poised to stand as an absolute powerhouse in the DMB terminal market based on leadership in technology, products, and brand," he said.

The launch of DMB service is part of several government-led initiatives to usher in a ubiquitous world, along with wireless broadband Internet, also called "WiBro." WiBro is a homegrown portable Internet service, which enables users on the move to remain online through portable devices such as mobile phones.

KT Corp., the nation's largest fixed-line telecommunications company, launched a trial run of WiBro Internet service last month on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum held in the southern city of Busan.

"When we are in the ubiquitous era, we will be living in a world where we have knowledge and robots everywhere," Information and Communication Minister Chin Dae-je said. People can watch television on DMB mobile phones and access the Internet on WiBro PDAs, he said.

The information minister said DMB phones will make up more than 70 percent of the handset market in three years, serving as a new growth engine for the nation's economy.

"WiBro is competing to become the mainstream mobility-specific Internet with W-CDMA," he said. W-CDMA is the third-generation wireless technology, which promises high-speed connection to the Internet at the same speed of the current fixed-line broadband.

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