Wireless World: New roaming standard?

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Consumer interest in mobile Internet access continues to climb, and computer industry leaders including Intel Corp. and others are now calling for the creation of a global roaming standard for wireless, experts tell United Press International's Wireless World.

Current standards like WiFi and WiMax cannot take wireless to the next level -- international roaming -- because convergence of technologies is creating new demands on networks.

At this week's Wireless Communications Association trade show in San Jose, Calif., Intel's general manager for mobile connectivity said there is "increasing" consumer demand for mobile wireless, and a global standard for WiMax should be established.

Other experts at the conference, like Sprint-Nextel Chief Operating

Officer Len J. Lauer, said they envision the mobile phone emerging as the "third screen," behind PCs and TVs, and that in order to keep up, Internet Protocol-based networks will have to be "transformed."

This transformation is leading to a "revolution" -- the creation of "personal mobile broadband," said Dr. Martin Cooper, co-founder and executive chairman of ArrayComm LLC and another speaker at the conference.

Thursday the industry announced its first certifications for fixed wireless broadband systems, the first products developed for 3.5 GHz systems, based on IEEE 802.16-2004 and ETSI HiperMAN standards.

To be sure, there is a capitalistic, not an altruistic, element behind all the interest in the standards-setting. "Those who favor interoperable standards are those who sell hardware -- or those who can conceive of Web-based services reaching ever-broader customer sets because their connections are more reliable, or exist at all," Rita Gunther McGrath, an associate professor at Columbia Business School at Columbia University in New York, told Wireless World.

Not everyone in the industry, however, wants or accepts the standards that are being promoted, she observed. "Resistance, such as it is, comes from those who would like to embed their intellectual property in a part of the platform in some way, and thus benefit from the growth of WiMax-enabled networks," said McGrath, who is also co-author of "MarketBusters: 40 Strategic Moves that Drive Exceptional Business Growth."

"So you'll see these folks holding out for specifications that favor their technologies in some way."

The "holy grail" for these companies would be to have their technology,

whatever it may be, become as universal in the WiMax platform as Qualcomm's technology is in mobile-phone CDMA devices. The idea for companies would be to "be able to collect transactional revenue from the IP held there," said McGrath.

This is what McGrath laconically labels the "enduring dilemma" of new technology "ecosystems."

Rather than simply pushing new standards, Gerald Flournoy, executive vice president of information-technology solutions at the Boston-based Millennium Group consultancy, told Wireless World that it is better to advocate for controls, metrics and analytic tools to measure outcomes and potential outcomes and get a "clear picture" of what is "smoke and mirrors" with new technologies and "what works."

There is already evidence, however, that mobile customers do much more than just talk with their mobile devices. A survey released earlier this week by Sprint shows that more than half of the nation's wireless-phone subscribers use their mobile phones for activities sometimes far flung from chatting.

"The list of features and data applications available on mobile phones continues to grow to meet the needs of consumers on the go," said Jeff Hallock, vice president of product marketing and strategy at Sprint, based in Overland Park, Kan.

For example, nearly two-thirds of consumers said they use mobile phones for the data-intensive application of obtaining maps and directions while traveling, the survey said.

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