

Company to offer 3-D navigation for 3G

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An Israeli company exhibiting at this week's 3GSM 2006 conference in Barcelona, Spain, plans to announce that its 3-D navigation technology, currently available in some Japanese cars, will be accessible to mobile devices by the end of 2006.

The Ra'anana-based 3DVU, formerly known as Flyover Technologies, plans to expand its services to 3G cellular phones, PDAs, mobile handsets and PCs using Intel's XScale technology. Company Chief Executive Officer Isaac Levanon said 3DVU is the first to offer this "Visual Map" imaging to handheld devices.

"You have these programs like Google Earth, which are used mainly in the office," Levanon said in a telephone interview from the airport on his way to Barcelona. This technology, he said, will help people actually navigate.

It's also a much bigger market than 3DVU's current ventures. For every one car navigation system, Levanon said, there are four mobile devices that could handle his company's technology.

The target consumers are members of Generation X and Y who are already familiar with computer and cell-phone technology, Levanon said.

Another reason the move will be so innovative, Levanon said, is because of the way the data is streamed to the mobile devices. He explained that when existing image navigation software pans across to nearby areas just off the screen, the software refreshes the entire screen. Thus, scrolling a

bit to the east, for example, looks like several still photographs displayed one after another on the screen.

3DVU's technology, Levanon said, simply adds pixels in the direction of the pan. In this case, panning would look continuous, like scrolling down on a Web site. This difference is not only smoother, but also costs the user and the operator less, Levanon said.

Reviews of the company's car navigation systems have been mixed. While Michael Rogers wrote in Newsweek in 2003 that 3DVU's technology was an exciting "hint of the future," Rafe Needleman wrote in Red Herring in 2001 that he'd rather have "the richness of a good (traditional) map, the exclusion of datanoise, and the art of fitting that information into a single image."

"On the other hand," he wrote, "when I'm lost, I just want directions."

Launched in 2000 at the height of the technology boom in Israel and around the world, the small, private company makes a profit, Levanon said. He declined to disclose any other revenue details.

In addition to the expansion into 3G, the company is hammering out a deal with Korean automaker Daewoo and with U.S. car companies, as well.

A statement on the company Web site said 3DVU has partnered with "satellite remote data-sensing entities, aerial photography companies, mapping data providers, navigation software makers and car navigation system designers and manufacturers." Also listed as partners are T-Mobile, Panasonic and Microsoft.

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