

3G TV goes interactive

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First there were Web cams. Then there were camera phones and 3G television streaming. Now there's BLOGTV, a kind of cable access for the 21st century.

"User-generated content is a big trend in the market," BLOGTV's vice president of business development, Dan Chen, told United Press International in a telephone interview. "This is just another (type). Before it was video, music and pictures, and now it's a live broadcast," Chen continued.

Anyone with a Web cam or video-conferencing capabilities on his cell phone can broadcast a live show, Chen said. To stream the technology correctly, users need at least 128 bits of uploading speed, though the faster, the better, he added. Viewers can pick which shows they want to watch and even chat with the broadcaster or other viewers via a chat bar at the bottom of the screen.

Some people broadcast their band's live performance, he said; others have talk shows. Chen broadcast the recent Euroleague soccer championship from a pub in London while a friend of his used the technology to broadcast straight from the stadium in Paris.

"Now everyone can be a news reporter," he said. "People who were (in the vicinity of the 2004 Asian) tsunami could have broadcast that."

The streamed television outlet is accessible by broadband Internet or by cell phones with 3G capabilities, Chen said, including those that can't

broadcast.

Those in the industry agree that "user-generated content" is the next big thing in cell phones. "There are all sorts of services on the Internet now that surfers create themselves, such as MySpace," Erez Gold, chief executive officer of mobile content company Goldrush, told UPI earlier this week. "That's the direction we're going in."

The reality-show aspect also appeals to users, other industry executives said. "What can be more interesting than watching other people's lives?" Kobi Markenko, the chief executive officer of Logia, said via BLOGTV's Web site.

"The BLOGTV is the real reality show of ... 3G and it is definitely one of Cellcom's major and most important and contemporary 3G content," he continued, referring to one of Israel's major mobile carriers.

However, the only carrier that supports video conferencing in Israel is Orange, so those are the only users who can broadcast their own shows, Chen said.

BLOGTV has attracted international attention in the past few months -- most recently, the company was named "New Trend Leader" at last Thursday's global mobile content awards in Seoul. The judging committee consisted of industry executives from Qualcomm, Orange UK, Red Herring and The Hollywood Reporter, the company said in a statement.

Another prestigious award came at February's 3GSM Conference in Barcelona, Spain, where the Ramat Gan, Israel-based company won the "Best Mobile Video Service" prize, Chen said.

Right now the service is only available to Israeli customers of the mobile

provider Orange, but BLOGTV is planning to develop broadcasting capabilities in "at least a few countries" with developed broadband infrastructure and 3G capabilities by the end of 2006, Chen said.

There were just fewer than 7 million mobile connections in Israel in 2003, according to the research firm Gartner, and in 2006 the company predicts there will be nearly 8 million mobile connections for the country's 7 million citizens.

Gartner also predicted that most of the mobile handsets sold here in 2006 will be "enhanced phones" and that the push to offer more and more content, gaming and fashionable phones is a consumer trend that is driving the worldwide mobile market.

According to new research Gartner released Wednesday, worldwide mobile handset sales in the first quarter of 2006 increased by 23.8 percent over the corresponding period last year, to 224 million phones.

Though the research company didn't release data on 3G sales specifically, Gartner said in a statement that 3G phone sales "held an important position in (market leader) Nokia's general sales in the first quarter and significantly influenced Nokia's average price during the quarter."

The company, a subsidiary of Israeli company Tapuz People, is in the process of establishing itself and becoming independent. The process is due to be complete very soon, Chen said, and BLOGTV plans to earn money through advertising and possibly subscription fees for the service.

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