

AT&T: In Cell Phones, Simple Is the New Sexy

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ORLANDO -- The new killer app for wireless is ease of use. That's the word that Randall Stephenson, chief operating officer of AT&T, delivered in his keynote speech at the 2007 CTIA Wireless conference here.

"The companies that make things simple and integrated; those are the companies that are going to win," Stephenson said, although details on how exactly AT&T plans to achieve this remained scarce.

Stephenson said that by the end of 2007, there will be 3 billion wireless users – half the planet, essentially. "Our customers are now taking advantage of high-speed data networks," he said. "The use of wireless data in commercial applications has skyrocketed to \$7.2 billion last year, from \$600 million in 1996."

"Today one in five of our customers use data," Stephenson added. "Over 45 percent of today's youth are now mobile data users, and a third post photos to Web sites using their mobile phones. Our partner in MySpace has generated an amazing response. Customers are using their wireless handsets to stay connected to their social networks. Since November, 12 million-plus votes were cast to see who could put together the most creative user-generated video, taken with a mobile phone."

Yet AT&T's most successful moments as a company are when they don't try to dictate how customers use their services, Stephenson said. "This term convergence, it's our term," he said. "It's not really the way

customers talk about it." He noted that after a recent speech, a few high-school students asked him, "What's the next really cool thing we're going to really be able to do?"

An example, he said, was video sharing. AT&T plans to introduce video sharing in 50 markets this summer.

"Video share's current iteration will let me share live, full motion color video in real time from one handset to another," Stephenson said. To illustrate the point, he demonstrated live video sharing between a father on his phone, and his young daughter using his PC back at home.

"I expect us soon to use video sharing in ways we've never imagined. You should expect in a very short time that the other screens, the PC and the television, will be brought into this," Stephenson added.

Waving an Apple iPhone, Stephenson demonstrated some finger movements with the touch-screen interface, claiming that it was the first time he actually tried one. "One million people have asked us to call them when this phone is available," he said.

AT&T will be the exclusive carrier for the iPhone upon its release in June, and for the foreseeable future as well, something that both Apple and AT&T have taken heat for in the press since the iPhone's announcement in January.

"I believe we've just scratched the surface on what's possible in wireless... History suggests that businesses underestimate the potential of these abilities," Stephenson said. He pointed out that in the recent past, the need for hard drive storage, broadband Internet access, and now wireless broadband have all been underestimated.

"I'm confident that in the not-too-distant future, the idea of needing

different handsets for different networks, or different screens for the different kinds of things you want to do, will be looked back upon as quaint," Stephenson said.

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