

Companies Aim to Put Projectors in Cell Phones

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Although the latest and greatest cell phones are all the rage at this years CTIA show, a new mobile device category emerged that many are calling "nano" or "pico" projectors.

Microvision , Texas Instrument and Explay have all thrown their hat into this ring and are working on these small projectors that could be available in various forms by early to mid 2008.

These are video projection systems that can either be built into cell phones, or, in some cases, could be stand-alone auxiliary projectors that can be connected to a cell phone and project an image up to 30 inches on a wall, or a simple sheet of 8" X 11" paper for multiple people to view content coming from the cell phone itself.

Microvision uses laser-scanning technology to deliver its solution while Texas Instruments taps into its own DLP technology to deliver its version of a nano or pico projector – the differences between "nano" and "pico" projectors remain largely undefined. Explay uses a hybrid of lasers and LED to create their solution.

All three have products are in various stages of development with Microvision and TI focusing on embedding their technology in actual cell phones so that they can be part of the cell phone itself. And while Explay also expects to have their technology integrated into cell phones some day, they will initially deliver a small stand-alone projector that can be attached to a cell phone, which could help them be the first to market

with an actual product in this new category of mobile devices.

Of the three products shown at CTIA, I actually got to have some hands-on time with the one from Explay, which is coming from Explay Ltd. , located in Herzliya, Israel. The early prototype is about four inches long and two inches deep and easily can fit in a pocket. According to Golan Manor, the company's vice president of technical marketing, the final standalone product will be a third of the size of the prototype.

Using this hybrid approach to delivering what was a pretty sharp image in a brightly lit convention hall, I was impressed with the actual display that was shown on the back of a 10-inch by 12-inch white envelope. According to Manor, the image will be even sharper and clearer in a room with less light. Even under the harsh lighting, however, it was easy to see the video being displayed, although some of the colors were washed out by the bright lights.

While it does use a wall or blank sheet of paper for viewing, the Explay Nano projector sports a pop out mirror that allows it to project the image on to a table top or flat surface as well – useful to show a guest a video or perhaps even a presentation without a wall or white piece of paper to serve as the projectors screen, such as in a restaurant. As for actual image brightness, all of these devices project images in the range of 10 lumens. As Explay's Manor note, it's the equivalent of 1300 lumens projecting at 100 inches.

Most likely, the devices will at least initially be aimed at a more business-centric audience, assuming that early pricing is above \$200 to \$300, as Manor predicted. I could see it used in sales presentations where a smart phone has a Powerpoint player on it, and used during lunch or dinner meetings to sell products.

Of course, it is not limited to presentations, or even video, and could be

used for games as well. But for it to gain traction in consumer markets, all three companies will have to prairie the devices to fit mainstream users' pocketbooks.

It is too early to tell if these new projectors can deliver the type of quality projection experience and pricing that will catch the fancy of business or consumer users. But they undeniably have a cool factor about them, and will at least get the attention of the business and consumer users when they finally come to market.

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