Battery-life Emerging as Significant Chokepoint for Multimedia Handsets

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Wellingborough, UK (4th October 2006) â€“ Poor battery performance in mobile handsets may hinder the uptake of emerging media services by consumers. Operators and handset manufacturers are both counting on multimedia applications such as mobile TV, MP3 players and sat-nav to drive data services and ARPU. However, studies have consistently shown that consumersâ€™ primary requirements for their mobile phones are the voice and text services. If the handset battery is too depleted from multimedia applications for the phone to be used for its primary functions, consumers will quickly be discouraged from using them on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, there have only been incremental increases in battery storage capacity in recent years, and no real breakthroughs are seen in the immediate future. Several different approaches to this problem have been taken by the leading manufacturers including designing more power efficient components and exploring alternative battery technology such as fuel cells. Motorola Chief Technology Officer Padmasree Warrior recently stated in a Reuters UK article that mobile phone power consumption is a key concern for the handset industry at the moment. Results for developing new fuel cells to ensure better battery life have been poor, she said, adding: "It will be just as important to develop components, software and applications that consume less power."

Several companies are looking into the development of fuel cell technology, with the most recent being NTT DoCoMoâ€™s alliance with Aquafairy to develop micro fuel cells for mobile devices. These efforts are critical, but practical results are still several years away from commercial availability.

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Analyst, Bill Morelli, said â€œit is important for handset manufacturers and component suppliers to address these issues ahead of delivery. With the trend, particularly for high-end models, to bundle in as much functionality as possible there will be an increasing strain on battery life. When they first came to market, all reports on 3G handsets were that they were big, bulky and of short battery life and this is the perception that many users still have today.â€•

In the short term, music player, mobile TV and sat-nav handsets may find themselves fighting an uphill battle with consumers who are not willing to trade talk time for the power drain caused by the multimedia applications. Although several recent reports have suggested that mobile phones will replace dedicated MP3 devices as the portable music player of choice, the power limitations of the handset battery could significantly limit consumer uptake.

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