

Multimedia
Home Platform

S T C



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DVB agrees open interactive TV standard

A new interactive broadcasting standard is set to revolutionise the market for digital television and convergence services worldwide. Called DVB-MHP (Multimedia Home Platform), this Java-based technology will use open software architecture to provide interactive services to digital TV customers regardless of the service provider and STB (Set Top Box) supplier. Types of services that will be launched once MHP is fully available range from digital text services – complete with high quality pictures and animation – to interactive shopping and Internet access. Officially approved by the DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting) Technical Module in January 2000, the new standard will be available in three 'profiles': enhanced broadcast, interactive broadcast and Internet access. Two of the three profiles (enhanced broadcast and interactive broadcast) have already been approved by the DVB and work is underway with the third one (internet profile). According to DVB chairman, Theo Peek, the MHP standard will help to develop the market for digital television services, just as GSM has done for mobile telephony. "This is one of the most important developments in DVB to date. It presents a significant milestone on the way to finalising the Multimedia Home Platform project." Several manufacturers, including Nokia, are backing the new multimedia standard with the first generation of MHP-compliant set-top boxes expected end of 2000. MHP technology also contains the necessary software for implementation in IDTVs (Integrated Digital Televisions) and multi-media PCs. Adds Mr Peek: "DVB is delivering on its promise to create the systems which will facilitate convergence

between the broadcasting, telecommunications and computing technologies in the horizontal market." At present, the digital TV market is developing along 'vertical' lines where broadcasters subsidise proprietary set-top boxes in return for customers subscribing to pay-TV channels.

Open standard According to Timo Lahnalampi, Product Manager, Nokia Multimedia Terminals, MHP offers several benefits over proprietary platforms – both to customer and service providers alike. "The open approach means that the end-user can buy a set-top box from any vendor and still receive a wide range of interactive applications." At the same time broadcasters can implement their own Conditional Access (CA) systems. Whereas today's proprietary set-top boxes use different and largely incompatible middlewares, MHP specifies Java based technology for its Application Programming Interface (API). Current proprietary middleware providers have stated they also will provide extensions to their middlewares in order to ensure compatibility with MHP when it is launched.

Modular approach Like the open and well-established GSM standard for mobile phones, MHP provides a modular approach that allows consumers to choose the equipment matching their own needs. Importantly, the standard is also backwards-compatible so customers buying MHP set-top boxes won't have to replace their equipment when new types of interactive services are added. "Customers who want everything the interactive platform has to offer will be able to buy a set-top box with the highest levels of processing power. "Alternatively, they will be able to choose a more basic unit instead," states Mr Lahnalampi. "This is similar to the mobile phone

market where users have the choice of buying a basic mobile phone for voice communications or a more advanced model that also offers interactive services using the very latest WAP technology." Compatible with all of the DVB platforms, MHP will be implemented by digital terrestrial (DVB-T), cable (DVB-C) and satellite (DVB-S) broadcasters both in Europe and the rest of the world. "America's OpenCable consortium is currently looking for a common API and is considering Java based approach," states Mr Lahnalampi. Spain's digital terrestrial service, Quiero TV (formerly ONDA digital) has already stated it will migrate to MHP from the OpenTV API as soon as the manufacturers are ready, while MHP is also the chosen interactive TV standard for Australia's digital terrestrial TV networks.