

Mobile World Congress 2008 – FLO Forum holds mobile TV roundtable

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Several specs coexist worldwide, and vendors support multiple standards

In Japan, One-Seg mobile TV is becoming popular, but worldwide, the mobile TV trend has just begun. The FLO Forum, which promotes the mobile TV specification MediaFLO, held a roundtable at Mobile World Congress 2008 on February 12. Representatives of Forum members talked about the current status of mobile TV from a worldwide perspective.



At present, several mobile TV specs coexist worldwide, including DVB-H and T-DMB as well as MediaFLO. Looking at the situation by region, QUALCOMM, which developed the basic technology, is strong in its home country America, while DVB-H is ahead in Europe. MediaFLO commercial service has been started by Verizon Wireless, and AT&T is also preparing to start. Demonstration experiment has been done in Japan, and is in progress in the UK. DVB-H commercial services have been started by several Italian operators including 3Italia, and a service is also getting underway in Finland, home to Nokia, which is strongly advocating DVB-H.

The FLO Forum is the industry organization that promotes MediaFLO, developing specifications and submitting them to standardization bodies. It has about 100 members.

Is a mixed bunch of standards inevitable?

Regarding the latest trends involving specifications, the EU announced its support for DVB-H in 2007. Kamil Grajski (VP for Engineering, QUALCOMM), the Forum's President, emphasized that: "Although DVB-H is recommended by the EU, its adoption is not obligatory." The Forum and several other organizations have submitted to the EU their opinion that it is too early to unify technologies into a single standard.

In fact, technologies and solutions have been provided for various specifications by many businesses in the mobile TV field, and it seems likely that the multi-standard situation will continue. Most companies taking part in the roundtable, including NDS Technologies (England), which provides access management technology, and Media Excel (U.S.), which provides transcoders, are also supporting DVB-H with their

The roundtable participants were unanimous in their opinion that efforts are being made to tackle these issues, and mobile TV will certainly become a worldwide norm.

We also interviewed Telecom Italia, which did not take part in the roundtable, at MWC. The company revealed that it is still searching for the best options regarding number of channels and billing. It started its mobile TV service 18 months ago, and now offers three TV-capable handsets; users are steadily increasing. Sports programs such as soccer are the most popular, and people watch for shorter times than initially anticipated. There are currently eight channels, and billing is on a subscription basis. Telecom Italia wants to add more channels and a pay-as-you-go option.