This Week’s Stories

AT&T Objects to Sprint’s West Virginia Complaints
May 10, 2011

As previously reported, Sprint has expressed displeasure towards AT&T’s plans to expand their LTE 4G network to encompass the state of West Virginia, and AT&T couldn’t be more indignant.

“AT&T is trying to bring the latest and fastest mobile Internet service to most of the citizens of West Virginia,” said J. Michael Schweder, President of AT&T for the Mid-Atlantic region. “Since Sprint is trying to stop that, we hope state officials will ask Sprint what its own plans are for bringing LTE speeds to the people of West Virginia. We suspect Sprint either has no such plan, or that its own plans pale in comparison to AT&T’s. In either case, we’re confident West Virginians will see Sprint’s filing for what it is—a cynical effort to hurt a competitor, even if the ones truly hurt are the many people of West Virginia who would be denied the fast mobile Internet speeds they need and want.”

Sprint’s anger came about as a result of the proposed merger between AT&T and T-Mobile, a purchase Sprint had also vied for, and which would afford the new mega-company over 80 percent of the U.S. market. The merger would purportedly provide next generation wireless to 97 percent of the country and provide more jobs than any other private American company. Furthermore, the merger deal would allegedly generate $8 billion dollars in infrastructure investment.

The merger, says AT&T, will bring wireless coverage to rural areas—a feat they claim Sprint is unable to accomplish. Their message to Sprint? Stop looking out only for yourself—think of the consumers who will now enjoy exposure to 4G LTE.

Google Puts its Chips on Developers
May 10, 2011

Search and advertising still pay the bills at Google, but as the company moves into new markets such as mobile and Web apps, increasingly its fortunes will be tied to developers outside the Googleplex.

At this week’s Google I/O developer conference here the company will be reaching out to thousands of these third-party developers in an effort to enlist their help in creating robust ecosystems for up and coming Google products. How successfully Google is able to tap into this developer culture to fuel growth in Google products will determine Google’s standing in the competitive landscape.

In mobile, this means that Google will have to get app developers to think of its Android smartphone and OS first rather than as an afterthought to developing apps for Apple’s iOS platform. It also means creating an ecosystem that pushes a cloud-based computing architecture with Web apps at its core.

On each front Google faces challenges. Despite the fact that it now dominates sales of smartphones in the U.S. and around the world, Google’s Android platform appears to be struggling to keep the attention of developers who worry about the platform’s fragmentation issues. These developers also worry about their ability to make money from the apps they create for Android.

Meanwhile, when it comes to Web apps, Google faces the challenge of improving the Web’s programming standards—in particular so that Chrome OS helps illustrate the power of Web apps rather than their shortcomings.

35 Percent Use Mobile Apps Before Getting Out of Bed
May 12, 2011

Thirty-five percent of Android and iPhone owners in the U.S. use apps such as Facebook on their smartphone before even getting out of bed, according to a survey conducted by telecommunications equipment vendor Ericsson.

The most popular in-bed activity is accessing social networks. Eighteen percent of users log in while they are still in bed, and the most popular application is Facebook, Ericsson wrote.

Today, Facebook has more than 250 million active users accessing the site through their mobile devices, according to its own statistics. Smartphone vendors are trying to capitalize on that success with tighter Facebook integration, in an effort to differentiate their products, according to Pete Cunningham, an analyst at Canalys. For example, HTC has launched the Android-based ChaCha and Salsa, which have a dedicated Facebook button. INQ and Sony Ericsson have also improved Facebook integration on some of their smartphones.
For the Week Ending May 13, 2011

In the next year, we’ll see more phone makers doing the same, but then they will have to find other ways to make their products stick out, Cunningham said.

Social networking remains important when people get up, with 22 percent of users checking in during the morning, and another 20 percent doing a last check in bed before going to sleep at night. However, the most popular time to check what friends are up to is late in the evening before heading to bed, according to Ericsson’s study.

The time of the day when smartphone usage is the lowest is during dinner, but 26 percent of users still can’t put their gadgets aside.

Ericsson’s survey also highlight the interest in tablets. When all U.S., respondents were asked what device they were considering purchasing, respondents were almost as likely to choose a tablet as a laptop -- 16 percent said that a laptop was the device they planned to buy next versus 13 percent that had their eyes on a tablet.

A new mobile phone was the most common choice with 19 percent, while only 6 percent were planning to buy a netbook.

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Google Inc. previewed the first laptops running the company’s Chrome operating system, machines that will go on sale next month as part of the Internet giant’s challenge to Microsoft Corp.’s Windows franchise.

The computers, unveiled at a Google conference for software developers in San Francisco, are dubbed “Chromebooks” and use operating-system software that is based largely on Google’s Chrome Web browser.

Google will start selling $349 Chrome-based laptops in June. One feature that’s caught gamers’ attention: Angry Birds will now be playable on the Chrome browser, DJ Newswires’ Ian Sherr reports.

The first models will be manufactured by Acer Inc. at a price of $349 and Samsung Electronics Co. starting at $429. They will be sold starting June 15 through retailers like Best Buy Co. and Amazon.com Inc.

Google won’t make money from sales to individuals but expects to get an undisclosed cut from selling selections for $4.99. Keep an eye on the liveblog for more information.

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Google Ice Cream Sandwich coming in Q4 2011 to Smartphones and Tablets alike
May 10, 2011

“One OS that runs everywhere.” There you have it, folks! Google intends to meld its Honeycomb tablet wares and Gingerbread smartphone software into one delicious Ice Cream Sandwich. Maybe that’s why the “sandwich” bit is in the name, eh? Either way, it’ll be a universal OS that runs on everything from teeny tiny Android phones to 10-inch tablets and will intelligently adapt to each form factor with things like a resizable status bar.

Some other fancy new additions were demonstrated during Google’s I/O 2011 keynote, including face-tracking and camera focus shifting based on voice recognition, but most of the salient details remain under lock and key for now. We’ll be sure to dig around Mountain View campus fridges in search for more clues about the next major iteration of Android.

www.engadget.com

Google Sets Laptop Foray
May 11, 2011

Google just announced movie rentals in the Android Market at its I/O conference. Chris from the Android services team just hit the stage at Moscone and demonstrated renting movies on the Android Market from your phone, tablet or PC with a single click. “Pinning” mirrors the experience with apps and books, you can select it on your PC and download to the device in the background for offline viewing. Movies are live in the market right now, support on all Android 2.2 or higher devices is expected “in a couple of weeks” and tablets will get support bundled with their upgrade to Android 3.1. On the PC, it ties back to the recently expanded YouTube rental service with the same restrictions (30 days to watch, 24 hour window once you start watching) and pricing, making that per-movie VOD price a bit easier to swallow with its cross-platform support and we even spied a few HD

news.yahoo.com

Products & Services

Android Market Launches Movie Rentals, Thousands of Titles Available to your PC, Phone or Tablet
May 10, 2011

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Scream at your Phone to Recharge it?
May 9, 2011

Who would have thought the answer to our renewable-energy quandaries might lie in the predominantly pointless nonsense spewing from our collective pie hole?

The Korea IT Times is reporting that "new research promises a way to recharge phones using nothing but the power of voice." A researcher at a South Korean university proposes using the sound of our voices and the cacophony around us to "trickle charge" batteries.

Sang-Woo Kim of the Institute of Nanotechnology at Sungkyunkwan University in Seoul is doing this pioneering work in the field of "scavenged energy." Evidently, the science identifies power sources generated by everyday life--such as the electricity generated by cars passing sound walls near busy freeways.

The technology turns sound into electricity by employing strands of zinc oxide sandwiched between electrodes. "A sound-absorbing pad on top vibrates when sound waves hit it, causing the tiny zinc oxide wires to compress and release," Kim reports. "This movement generates an electrical current that can then be used to charge a battery."

A prototype system was able to convert around 100 decibels--the equivalent of noisy traffic--to 50 millivolts of electricity, The Telegraph reports. The technology could prove useful, for example, if you forgot to charge your phone and could do so just by chatting with a friend on the way to work.

Of course, Kim worries about an already noisy world growing louder so we can all get an extra jolt out of life. He envisions people shouting louder into their phones (and into people's ears) to keep their phones up and running. Could this lead to an energy race searching for the loudest and most annoying people to keep our batteries charged? Such revolutionary thinking could promote the likes of Rush Limbaugh and Rosie O'Donnell into energy moguls on par with OPEC.

If we could somehow hook up power cells to next year's presidential debates and collect both endless noise and any related hot air, we might not need to ever build another windmill or solar panel. If the noise of a happy, boisterous crowd can be employed to keep the lights on, we could set up mikes and batteries in the booze-lubed amphitheaters of fabulous Las Vegas. But we'll avoid the Charlie Sheen live tour stops to avoid a nationwide blackout. And Carlos Mencia shows are off the menu. Ditto for Dane Cook. We'll work on that.

The imagination overheats ticking off all of the options. I had a girlfriend a few years back who could've kept Seoul lit up like a Kia's high beams. I'll keep an eye out for her, too.

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Emerging Technology

$28-a-month subscriptions to corporate customers and $20-a-month plans for educational institutions and governments. The plans, which come with a three-year term, include the laptops and customer support from Google.

The move, more than two years in the making, comes at a time that sales of laptops, especially small, low-priced netbooks, have been pressured by rising interest in touchscreen tablets like Apple Inc.'s iPad.

The Google-based laptops are designed primarily to run Web-based applications, including word-processing and games, as Google hopes to shift software development away from applications anchored to PC operating systems such as Windows. Besides individuals, chromebooks are aimed at corporate and government markets; Google officials said they would help institutions cut IT budgets by storing data on the Web, a concept called cloud computing.

"The complexity of managing your computers is really torturing users out there, and that's a flawed model," said Sergey Brin, Google's co-founder, at a press briefing on Wednesday. "Chromebooks are a new model that doesn't put the burden of managing your computer on yourself," adding that "companies who don't use that model I don't think will be successful."

Sundar Pichai, the senior vice president that oversees the Chrome effort, said the battery in Acer's version of the product lasts more than six hours while Samsung's lasts eight hours. Other manufacturers, including Toshiba Corp. are also building devices running the software, Google has said.

Because they rely on Web-based apps, the Chrome devices boot up in eight seconds, the company said. The laptops will have limited capability when users aren't online, though some Web apps including Google Docs, the company's word-processing service, and Rovio Mobile Ltd.'s Angry Birds game, can function on Chrome offline.

online.wsj.com

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**Mergers & Acquisitions**

**Microsoft Swipes Skype**  
May 10, 2011

Well, it wasn't Facebook or Google that ended up with Skype, as had been rumored earlier in the week, but rather Microsoft. The company today announced that an $8.5 billion cash purchase of the VoIP carrier has been approved by the boards of directors of both Microsoft and Skype. Silver Lake investment group, which purchased Skype in 2009 from eBay, oversaw the transaction.

Skype will become a new business division within Microsoft, and Skype CEO Tony Bates will assume the title of president of the Microsoft Skype Division, reporting directly to CEO Steve Ballmer.

Microsoft said the acquisition will increase the accessibility of real-time video and voice communications, bringing benefits to both consumers and enterprise users and generating significant new business and revenue opportunities.

Skype reported 170 million connected users in 2010 and over 207 billion of voice and video conversations. Microsoft said it has a long-standing focus and investment in real-time communications across its various platforms, including Lync (which saw 30 percent revenue growth in Q3), Outlook, Messenger, Hotmail and Xbox LIVE.

Microsoft said it plans to see Skype support its flagship products like Xbox and Kinect, Windows Phone and a wide array of Windows devices.

Rumors had been flying recently regarding a possible suitor for the company, with Reuters suggesting in a May 5 report that it was Facebook that wanted Skype most. Skype's postponement of a planned IPO was a red flag for many, suggesting the company was in talks about a possible buyout.

While Skype's base is huge, the company has been criticized because so few of its customers actually pay to use the service. At the end of 2010, Skype reported that just over 6 percent of its users were actually paying users, resulting in ARPU of $97 per paying user.

Skype was founded in 2003 and was later acquired by eBay in September 2005. eBay sold the company to the investment group led by Silver Lake in November 2009.

**Industry Reports**

**Wireless Carriers Deploying Femtocells in Larger Numbers**  
May 9, 2011

Just about everywhere you are looking these days, wireless carriers have been deploying femtocells in larger numbers and in more and more cities lately. And the trend has been growing rapidly as demand for mobile services keeps increasing at a rapid clip.

And while the largest deployments are aimed at the mobile consumer market, wireless carriers are increasingly looking to extend femtocells to business customers and high-traffic indoor and outdoor locations such as shopping malls, banks, in many downtown facilities, at airports, subway and railway stations.

However, these deployment models introduce new challenges in the way femtocells are provisioned and managed. And public access femtocells offer significant benefits as well, not only in delivering improved QoS (Quality of Service), but also in offloading data traffic from the carriers' overloaded networks.

The largest implementations of femtocells are still in residential deployments, however, with AT&T Mobility, Vodafone Group and Sprint Nextel in the limelight. The key motivation for these femtocell offerings is simply to improve the quality of mobile phone service in the home with better voice quality, fewer dropped calls (a growing problem that needs to be addressed rapidly) and faster 3G data speeds.

The wireless carriers hope that improved service will make for happier and more loyal customers, a premise consistent with the largest survey on consumer attitudes to femtocells, carried out by Parks Associates on behalf of the FemtoForum. The survey of more than 6,000 wireless users in six countries revealed that femtocells could prevent up to 42 percent of churn rates caused by poor quality in-building cellphone service, which is the single most important criteria by which consumers rate their mobile network provider.

**Mobile Industry in Crosshairs of New Do Not Track Bill**  
May 10, 2011

Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) introduced a new bill yesterday that would enable consumers to browse the
Internet and use mobile phones without having their movements tracked.

The Do Not Track Online Act of 2011 addresses the data-collection practices of Internet and mobile companies by supporting a mandatory browser-based Do Not Track mechanism that would give users a way to opt out of having their information collected.

“Essentially, this is a Do-Not-Call service for the digital age,” said Jeff Chester, executive director at the Center for Digital Democracy, Washington. “But instead of eliminating nuisance phone calls, this bill eliminates a far more dangerous practice: tracking and profiling based on the collection of personal information without or knowledge or consent.

“The provisions of the Do Not Track bill, consumers will be able to decide for themselves whether or not they want to share personal information, including their various Internet and mobile Web activities,” he said.

The bill comes at a time when there has been a lot of activity around privacy, the Internet and mobile phones.

Senators John McCain (R-AZ) and John Kerry (D-MA) recently introduced an Internet privacy bill recently that does not have a Do Not Track component.