

# The Video Virgin Phenomenon

*By Alon Barnea, General Manager of RADVISION's mobile business*

It's hardly a secret that 3G video hasn't lived up to its original promise. What's more the industry is now running out of excuses like lack of availability of 3G phones or service. We've all heard talk of the long awaited killer application that failed to materialise, so what - if anything - can pull us out of the doom and gloom now surrounding the future of 3G?

My belief is that there is light, and even video, at the end of this particularly murky tunnel. What's more I think there are a few reasons to be cheerful about the prospects for 3G video and 3G in general. One of them is the advent of interactive, real-time video applications. Current 3G video offerings have not found a real following. Even the recent World Cup failed to really set the Mobile TV market on fire in the way the industry had hoped. Part of the problem with this was the delay in sending goal clips meant that they weren't happening in real time. The use of video on mobile is a very different medium to the TV in your lounge. People expect a different experience from it -- fast food on the go rather than a sit down full four-course meal. It should be a dialogue that engages and involves the user and can inform or entertain and be adapted to each individual's interests and needs at a given context.

An example of just such an interactive application has been launched by '3' in Austria. It allows skiers to dial in to receive a live video feed of many of the country's leading ski slopes using data from CCTV cameras on the slopes themselves. The key to its success being the fact that they can access the information while on the move; in the car or at the airport and get the actual real time images of various slopes, enabling real-time decision - the mobile style.

Another new capability for 3G video that will enhance the mobile experience is the ability to engage in a real-time dialogue with multiple users creating video communities. The various combinations of 'see you see me' capability have the potential to hugely impact the adult entertainment industry, particularly when combined with interactivity.

In order for video telephony to come of age it needs to be more than recorded content on a small screen. It needs to build on the very nature of the mobile medium and allow individuals to communicate and share their experiences while on the move. At the very heart of the mobile experience is the fact that we are used to compromising on quality and size of the screen in return for mobility and timeliness of the medium. The mobile applications of the future will need to embrace this mobility and find ways of allowing people to share what's happening to them at any given time with a group of friends, family or video community. One such example that has been launched by Orange Israel has enabled 3G users to engage in a nationwide Internet WebBlog, making it like a reality TV show that is broadcast via the Internet. Anyone with a 3G phone out and about can broadcast live what's happening to and around them - whether it's an event like a concert or a sporting event, a chance encounter with someone famous - whatever is happening to you while you're out and about can be seen live by anyone logged on the Tapuz.co.il website. The success of this service has been phenomenal and is an example of the future of video applications and what is possible by mixing the ubiquity of the Internet with mobility.

Which brings me to my next point: the problem with critical mass. It's all very well having these wonderful rich interactive, bi-directional video capabilities but if too many of the people you want to communicate with don't have 3G you've got a problem. It's like in the early days of the fax machine, the idea of owning a fax machine was great, but meaningless until there was the critical mass of fax machines to make them useful. So how can 3G escape from the straitjacket imposed by the fact that only one in ten of people own a 3G phone? The answer is simple - transform existing medium to peer with 3G handsets, tap into the proliferation of PCs out there. The fact that we can now provide the capability to turn, for the sake of video calls, your PC into a 3G like device will dramatically change the end game. Imagine the appeal for business travellers away from their friends and family, to be able to dial a number from their 3G phone and be connected to a PC for a live video call. It may not be that compelling proposition to see your business associates on the phone, but a two way visual experience with your nearest and dearest is something that I personally am more than happy to pay for.

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Last but not least, I believe that today it might still be worth offering many of the new video services using dialling as a preferred user interface. Not only is dialling the most natural user interface over mobile devices, but the guaranteed quality and fast interactive response enable it to be a real delight, which overcomes some of the current hesitations and limitations of "surfing & streaming " over mobile devices.

The mobile industry is adept at waiting for the next big thing. IMS and HSDPA are the gods the industry appears to be worshipping of late. But, why wait until the next technology is mature when new compelling interactive video experiences are available and working today. Keeping the options open to migrate to new platforms as they become available is a good thing, but there are operators and mobile developers out there today who have realised that the time is now and that we can build on capabilities for 3G which are available today - all we need is a little imagination to develop applications that are truly compelling to grab the attention of mobile users and tempt the video virgins to sample the delights of this compelling new visual medium.