

Crisp Telecom Limited



The Outlook for Mobile Communication Services

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Following the disappointment of WAP, the outrageous licence costs and hype around 3G then one would be forgiven for being a little skeptical about any new initiative, especially if it relies on data over GPRS.

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Multimedia Messaging Service

Data is not a subject that excites many end-users, however multi-media messaging (MMS) just might. Remember that no one really expected a fairly primitive text messaging service called SMS to be popular, but it is reported that next year 16 billion will be sent in the UK alone.

Take SMS, add pictures and sound, then throw in sexy multi-media terminal and you have a compelling proposition. The potential for use, or misuse of MMS is huge and it has every chance of being a success. Of course the Service Providers could spoil the party by over-charging, being incompatible with other networks, or needing quirky set-ups that not even customer care can understand, but let us hope that the lessons of the past will have been well learned.

We should not have to wait too long for such features. T-Mobil has been advertising camera phones for its networks and Vodafone-Live products may be around for Xmas.

Initially the services may be restricted to postcard type messages but with a high-end multi-media phone plus data bearer, there is no fundamental barrier to media download/streaming and video clips, although we may have to wait for 3G to have useable quality Video Telephony.

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Application Download

As the mobile devices become more PC-Like then application download is also possible, perhaps in the form of Java applets. This could open a floodgate for new service creation and the possibilities seem endless. In the early days this may only be for the brave, as there will no doubt be great temptation for others to exploit the new technology to push back the boundaries of Virus design and distribution. The more cautious amongst us may wait for the reassurance of a secure download and execution environment.

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Unified Messaging

As the mobile device becomes an increasingly rich messaging terminal, users may begin to question how they manage messages in general. For example many private users will also have fixed line access to ISPs with associated email addresses and domain names. Company users may have an IT solution that they are obliged to use, perhaps with some restrictions on what types of information can be forwarded and to where. Add in voicemail for fixed and mobile phones, maybe a FAX machine and you have a confusing number of addresses and message stores.

Unified messaging (UM) is to be the cure i.e. a single system that sorts out the mess.

Sounds great, but a question hangs over where you would base your UM system and whether there would be sufficient flexibility and compatibility to handle all scenarios. The queue may already be forming

to offer us UM e.g. Mobile Operators, ISPs, Phone companies, independents, terminal manufacturers etc. Let us hope the solutions work and are affordable.

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Wallets and Payments

After MMS the great hope is to use the mobile phone as a method of payment. Of course mobile users are already paying for services via their call charges. SMS is an example of paying for a messaging service whose value relates little to the cost of transferring the bits of information. Premium rate services offer another method of billing for more valuable content and downloading ring-tones etc. So the concept of paying for lots of little things i.e. "micropayments", seems fairly well accepted and whilst it is not exactly rocket-science the limited flexibility of some billing systems may hinder its use.

The big step forward is when you purchase high value items using your mobile, like the new television or that expensive summer holiday.

Here you need the equivalent of your wallet i.e. a relatively safe holder of payment methods that is under your control. A credit card is a fairly common payment method and when used with a PC can provide a means of making internet purchases. However the transactions are unwieldy and there is a perceived risk of fraud, especially with unknown merchants and systems. What is required is a mutually secured environment with an access device that is easy for the customer to use. Here the mobile scores as not only is it a communications device but it also contains a Smart Card similar to those found in credit cards and as a matter of course supports high security protocols for network access.

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The real challenge is to offer compatible solutions, as a customer will not want to set-up a completely new system, just because he changes ISP, Bank, Operator or uses a different access network.

The Mobile Payment Forum has the potential to achieve some cross industry compatibility, as it brings together a range of business interests, particularly network operators and financial service companies.

However the World is not short of forums that become political talking shops, so let us hope the MPF delivers some much-needed practical solutions

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Keith Mayes 22/10/02

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