Contextual Communications for the Mobile Masses

The concept of unified communications (UC) is so overused it crowds out expansive thinking about the services that enterprises and wireless subscribers will use every day. The real deal is more accurately called "contextual communications," and refers to intelligent handling and support of communications, interactions and transactions in the most appropriate manner based on analysis of each caller's situation, including support of voice, text, graphics, video in real-time or asynchronously.

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Key Findings:

The wireless world transcends time and space. Subscriber devices range from the sublime touch-sensitive, high-speed iPhone to the ridiculously single-function, low-end handsets. Mobile operators are well-aware of the need to tailor their services to accommodate a wide variety of user contexts; thus they use multiple delivery channels to deliver information, entertainment and conversations in the proper context:

- **Wireless subscribers expect more "on-the-glass" interactions** – Ease-of-use promotes repeated use. Thus wireless operators limit the number of screens, menus and "clicks" required to accomplish a given task.

- **Supporting many "channels" and asynchronous interactions** – Channels include traditional voice conversation, text messaging, graphics, music and video. This creates a challenge for service providers to weave together a user experience that encompasses combinations and permutations of possible modes of communications.

- **Over Europe's GSM networks, USSD provides a cost effective alternative to SMS** – The Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD) link provides a low-cost way for service providers to enable users to serve up menus, promote browsing and support transactions.

- **In the U.S., multiple modes include Voice, SMS and the Wireless Internet** – Support of multiple "channels" and interactions requires a robust application management environment.

- **Wireless carriers find value in building multi-channel or multimodal applications** – In Europe, South Africa and Latin America (where GSM prevails) text messaging based on USSD or SMS is supporting self-service, Web browsing and e-commerce.

- **Subscribers create their own context** – Retailers have long acknowledged that "the customer is always right." The adage applies to wireless service providers as well, but they need to know more about each subscriber's "state" and the context of his or her request.

- **Contextual video is next** – Users and small business are (finally) ready to ride the wave of mobile video. Tools for editing and distributing content that contains video are making new peer-to-peer and transactional services possible.

- **Service development and management software is available** – Vendors, such as VoiceObjects, are addressing multi-channel, contextual communications applications and services.

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Table of Contents

Table of Figures

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