



Taking It to the Streets

Don't wait for the auto industry to do it. The wireless industry has an opportunity today to take navigation systems to the next level.

By Andrew Seybold
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Last month Verizon introduced its first phone that includes VZ Navigator, a navigation system that provides turn-by-turn directions, points of interest and voice prompts. I have experimented with this phone and tested it against my onboard navigation system. It works great!

Navigation systems are gaining momentum. More of our vehicles are sporting them and there are many aftermarket units that work well; I have tested a number of them and continue to evaluate as many different models as I can. VZ Navigator is different though, and it got me thinking about what the future for navigation systems holds. Verizon, in conjunction with Networks In Motion, has been able to duplicate navigation features in a handset, which means the wireless industry has an opportunity take the lead in this area.

Consider this: States are spending about a million dollars per mile to embed sensors into highways to measure actual speeds, and companies such as IntelliOne out of Atlanta are providing real-time traffic speeds by measuring the movement of thousands of phones (ESNs and phone numbers are stripped so, no, this is not big brother!). The next step is to be able to find out what the traffic conditions are ahead of us. Instead of signing onto MapQuest and learning the average time of our trip from point A to point B, we will be able to tap into real-time speeds and the average speed on a given section of highway for a given time of day.

Now let's step back and look at where these capabilities will show up first. It takes the auto industry a long time to add new features to their vehicles. How long have we been waiting for Bluetooth hands-free car kits? Navigation systems built into our cars contain data that is several years old and they have no connection to the outside world. OnStar offers GPS tracking, but no screen in the car. We can assume it will be a long time before we see interactive navigation/traffic reporting systems from automakers.

Aftermarket navigation suppliers would have to put together new systems with built-in wireless devices (phones) and customers would have to subscribe to a service to receive traffic information. However, such a system can be quickly integrated with cell phones since the traffic information comes from the network.

Taking this to the next logical step, we have a cell phone with a navigation application on it with integrated real-time traffic reporting directly to the phone. Now

we can find out, in real time, how long our trip will take. It also means we can be rerouted if there is an accident or construction slowdown ahead, and updates to the database can be downloaded as changes occur.

I believe the wireless industry has the opportunity to make a serious dent in the navigation market. Our devices are becoming more integrated with other consumer electronics devices and services, and this will be no exception. Let's take this one step further. What if we have a screen or small display built into our cars and use Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, UWB or even a USB cable to connect our phone to the screen and speakers? Now we have the best of both worlds. A navigation/traffic device we can use in the car or take with us, and the automakers don't have to decide what to build in or how to integrate navigation and traffic. The wireless industry will do it for them.

I think this is yet another opportunity for the wireless industry—a big one. Of course, I believe that aftermarket navigation systems will have build-in wireless chipsets in the future, as will automakers for high-end cars. The wireless industry has the tools to capture a large portion of the navigation market for the rest of us—including all of us guys who hate to ask for directions!

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