European DMB project MI FRIENDS kicks off preparing a successful future for mobile media

MI FRIENDS stands for “Mobile Interactive-Favourite TV, Radio, Information, Entertainment and New Digital Services”. MI FRIENDS was initiated by the Bayerische Landeszentrale für neue Medien (BLM), Munich. It is a pilot project in accordance with Article 30 of the Bavarian Media Law (Bayerisches Mediengesetz), comprising four distinct phases:

DMB-project Regensburg (Germany)
DMB-project FIFA World Cup Munich 2006 (Germany)
DMB-cross border project Lake Constance, (Austria, Switzerland and Germany)
DMB-project South Tyrol/TRANSALP (Austria and Italy)

In November 2005 the MI FRIENDS project was accorded the CELTIC-label, in recognition of its contribution to the EUREKA programme.

Current situation

In the last few years, it has become clear that society, the environment, and not least, the media world have been changing: The future will be multi-medial and hyper-mobile. More than ever, we will live in a “mobile information society.”

The question remains: “What kind of infrastructure do we need for this mobile information society?” As we don’t live in paradise, we always have to consider what is the best balance between costs and benefits. In order to answer this question, we need to look at what it takes to deliver a sustainable and future-compliant infrastructure for mobile broadcasting and media services. First and foremost, the answer depends on the patterns of human behaviour, and the environments in which their activities take place – in short, the needs of the mobile population – especially mobile media users.

The mobile media future
- all media in one device

In the near future, the reception and use of media at home or in the office will still be dependent on specialised devices, using different delivery systems (cable, satellite, terrestrial systems) to deliver a convenient service.

However, further down the road, the reception and use of devices for media on the way or on the road will be characterised by convergence of media by using **one** device**.** The key to a sustainable and future-compliant infrastructure capable of delivering Mobile Multi-Media Broadcasting and Media Services is the use of MPEG4 H.264 as an intermediary technology. This doesn't mean a convergence in a narrower sense of a physical growing together but rather the development of compatible approaches in the sense of the interoperability of various technical standards.

Sustainable mobile media future
by interworking infrastructures and technologies

In order to plan terrestrial systems or services for mobile use there are – among other things – two basic factors:

- density of population
- speed of traffic.

A successful and sustainable infrastructure for mobile broadcasting and media services must be able to cover many different types of environment, including:

- metropolitan areas
- urban areas
- rural areas (e.g. holiday resorts) with low population densities

and all types of travel methods such as:

- high-speed trains
- motorways
- secondary roads
- pedestrian precincts

For this purpose we need:

- full coverage for all types of activities and in all types of environment
- flexible and (spatially) scalable coverage
- robust and “speed-independent” reception
- minimal power consumption (in the devices)
- an optimal cost-benefit-relation

The DAB - EUREKA 147 (Digital Audio Broadcasting) standard and its latest development DMB (Digital Multimedia Broadcasting) which became a European ETSI-Standard in July 2005 already meet these requirements. The MI FRIENDS project is based on these standards and it is intended to adopt 2-3 G/UMST-standards for interactive services.

Rather than adopting a “single-technology-approach” based on competing technologies , the MI FRIENDS project is designed as a “multistandard-initiative” to create a sustainable mobile media future using compatible infrastructures and promoting collaboration between different (and hitherto competing technologies, like DAB/DMB and DVB-H. To this end, some project partners of MI FRIENDS are already working towards a combined solution (DAB/DMB + DVB-H).

MI FRIENDS seeks to transforms imminent technological and economic threats into new opportunities, thereby strengthening the prospects for the mobile media future. This especially includes new strategies to master probably the biggest challenge: availability of spectrum. In this connection, discussions about the future use of spectrum in the international Regional Radio Conference (RRC 06) have just started.

MI FRIENDS – beyond “mobile TV” scope and objectives

The goal of the MI FRIENDS project is to develop and test new media technologies from an economy viewpoint, paying particular regard to social and cultural aspects with the media consumer at its centre. The main emphasis of the project is on the development of new content and services providing mobile media for the local-regional area. Thus, the main aim of the project could be summed up as: making media available anywhere, anytime and anyway, for users across Europe.

The research and development activities of MI FRIENDS are intended to support the creation of new mobile media services beyond “mobile TV” such as the integration of radio and interactive services, as well as personalised multimedia services, using storage concepts like “tagging”. Another very

interesting research field of MI FRIENDS is a the development of 3D-DMB services capable of being used on handheld receivers.

The MI FRIENDS project is designed to support a holistic view of the entire value chain of mobile media. Examples include the development of new content and services, as well as new ways of facilitating user-driven innovation and business models. This is closely linked to the development of devices, testing the combination of broadcast with return channels. In sum, there is huge potential for mobile media.

European DMB-project MI FRIENDS international Cluster of Innovation

MI FRIENDS is geared up to deliver the major goal of a new architecture of infrastructures for services & applications in mobile multimedia, by testing integrated telecommunication solutions in a pan European 'laboratory' over a period of 24 months.

The MI FRIENDS project is characterised by:

1 joint European "near to market" project with
4 phases in
4 EUREKA countries (A, CH, I, D) with
75 designated project partners from
9 different countries (A, CH, UK, F, NL, I, S, ROK, D) in
10 work packages, over
24 months duration, in partnership with

12% research institutes and universities
20% market leaders
68% SME´s (in technics, programmes, economics) in
2 key markets with strong growth potential for the future – the market for "information and communication" and the market for "mobility" with
400 test users in each phase.

The Munich phase of the project is ready to start. The launch of this first MI FRIENDS-showcase with multimedia offerings will coincide with the start of the FIFA World Cup in early June.

The Korean project partners - the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) of the Republic of Korea, LG and SK Telecom - will

make available 400 mobile phones (Type LG-V9000) and 1000 USB-DMB receivers equipped to receive and test these new mobile services. For this purpose monitoring of initial users will be carried out.

The DMB-Regensburg phase of the project is planned to start in September 2006.

Conclusion / Outlook

The guiding principle of all the project partners in MI FRIENDS is to work together in an open innovation way, not simply from a technological and economic perspective, as well as from a socio cultural view but also paying particular regard to the need to “think global and act local”.

This could be a good formula for the successful creation of an advanced and ‘right-sized’ infrastructure for the mobile information society of tomorrow. After all, broadcasting standards and structures will no longer be laid down by regions or states on their own, but more than ever before depend on compatibility with an European framework. MI FRIENDS offers favourable conditions to generate a successful European growth engine for the new triple play of mobile voice + mobile internet + mobile broadcasting. Furthermore MI FRIENDS is a great opportunity for all stakeholders in digital broadcasting and new services (such us media users, content-providers, net providers, device industry and researchers) to make the vision happen:

“The media in your hands, with MI FRIENDS”

An introduction to the project is available at
www.mi-friends.org

The website also provides further information about test regions and the project streams as well as the CELTIC organisation and its partners.

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