

COMPUTERWORLD

Will your next phone be a videophone?

Videophones such as the Ojo have matured, just as video calling is expected on mobile phones such as the fourth-generation iPhone

Matt Hamblen

By Matt Hamblen

May 13, 2010 06:00 AM ET

Computerworld - Videophone technology has matured to the point that sales of the devices could explode in the next two years.

In one example, ACN Inc. of Concord, N.C., recently announced it is buying at least 300,000 Ojo Vision digital videophones over the next two years from WorldGate, a Trevese, Pa., provider of phones and services.

The Ojo devices, with 7-inch screens, operate as wired desk-style phones and will be sold to consumers and businesses alike, ACN Chairman and co-founder Robert Stevanovski told *Computerworld* on Wednesday.

The phones are equipped with a video out port, meaning the video can be viewed on a nearby flat-panel display.

They will sell at retail for \$200 to \$250, below the price of videophones currently on the market, and they will offer high quality video resolution with 150 Kbit/sec of wired throughput, Stevanovski said.

Recent generations of videophones have required 450 Kbit/sec of throughput to provide quality video resolution.



Ojo's Vision videophone

Recent generations of videophones have required 450 Kbit/sec of throughput to provide quality video resolution.

ACN also plans to sell the Ojo Vision with a \$30 monthly residential service, which can replace a conventional home phone service, allowing all the cordless phones in a home to connect to a wired network via a hub connected to the Ojo device, he added.

ACN has sold about 250,000 videophones in the past two years, using products from UMEC in Taiwan. Based on prior success with that product, "which is only half as good as Ojo," Stevanovski projected promising sales for the new device.

He also cited an "onslaught of high speed Internet" that will allow videoconferencing to become more prevalent.

Cisco Systems recently purchased Tandberg and has been promising a home-based videoconferencing system later this year, although the form factor is not known.

Video systems and video transport have taken up a central role in Cisco's future plans.

Stevanovski predicted dozens, if not hundreds, of competitors will enter the market in the next few years as customers realize the value of videoconferencing in communications.

The videophone concept has been around for decades, but caught the public's imagination with the appearance of the AT&T Picturephone at the New York World's Fair in 1964.

"That device never had a proper delivery system and even 10 years ago there was not enough bandwidth to deliver a good enough videoconferencing experience," Stevanovski said.

Not only are wired networks more robust, but wireless networks are getting faster. Cable TV and wired telecom providers are offering high-definition home television, while wireless carriers are touting new smartphones that transport video clips.

The new fourth-generation iPhone, due out this summer, is expected to include a wireless video chat function with a front-facing camera.
