



Anthony Sethill says Frontier Silicon will expand. Photo: Dickson Lee

# Mainland media firms get head start on 3G with mobile TV

Georgina Lee

While China's telecom operators await Beijing's decision on 3G licences before they can roll out multi-media services, mainland media groups are getting a head start this month by launching mobile television services in Beijing and Shanghai using technologies such as digital mobile broadcasting (DMB), which require no state approval.

Shanghai Media Group (SMG) will collaborate with Shanghai Mobile to offer mobile TV services between 30 yuan and 50 yuan a month on handsets from Korean firms LG

and Samsung. Beijing Broadcasting Corporation is following suit.

The emergence of mobile television in China is attracting firms such as British chip company Frontier Silicon, whose chief executive Anthony Sethill predicts mobile television based on the terrestrial digital mobile broadcasting standard (TDMB) – meaning they can show digital channels made available free from terrestrial broadcasters – will take off before 3G.

Demand for TDMB-enabled phones would create at least a US\$66 million market for the chipset industry next year, Mr Sethill

said, based on an add-on cost of US\$33 per phone for the mobile television feature. He sees a TDMB mobile phone market of 2 million in China next year.

Globally, investment bank Credit Suisse predicts 15 per cent of handsets will have a mobile television function by 2009, creating a US\$1 billion market for the chip industry, although these figures include competing standards in the US and Japan.

"3G still has limitation on bandwidth and is therefore not the solution for mobile TV," Mr Sethill said. He also pointed out that while the

next-generation of 3G – high speed data packet access (HSDPA) – was faster than the existing technology, it did not have the inherent advantage of a traditional point-to-multipoint network when broadcasting television streams.

Frontier Silicon has been developing chips for mobile digital TV since 2004. Credit Suisse forecast that there will be 10 million units of mobile digital TV phones sold this year, growing to 100 million by 2009.

To tap into this growing market, Frontier Silicon is planning to open two more technical and sales offices in Beijing and Shanghai next year,

expanding from its base in Shenzhen. It will also begin designing chips in China, having previously limited that to its design centres in Cambridge and Dublin.

The firm is also working on a multi-standard mobile TV chip dubbed "paradiso", which can support both the TDMB and DVB-H standard common in Europe. This will hit the market in early 2007.

Mr Sethill said China would have different standards for mobile TV and firms would make handsets supporting multiple broadcasting standards in the next 12 to 18 months.

**ESC SEQUENCES**  
Welcome diversions on the Web  
Danyll Wills

**WORLD CUP WIDOWS**

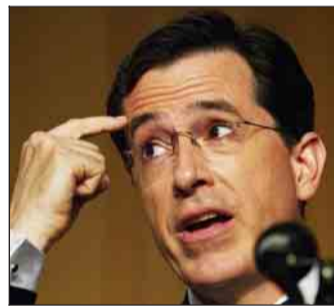
Switzerland thinks it can come to the rescue of those poor wives and girlfriends about to be "jilted" as their men turn their attention to this year's football World Cup. Beefy hunks in the Alps will give the ladies all the attention they crave. The site requires Flash 7 software. [www.myswitzerland.com/en/movies/wm](http://www.myswitzerland.com/en/movies/wm)

**APPLE GOES AFTER THE PC**

This is for Mac fans: six little videos of two men talking. One is "Mac" and the other is "PC". This will not be a hit at Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Washington, but the little movies are fun. Just the thing if you want to irritate your Windows-attached friends. [www.apple.com/getamac/ads](http://www.apple.com/getamac/ads)

**THE NAME IS L'BOND**

Here is a first look at the new agent 007, but in French. The clip is quite interesting, even if you do not understand the language. It gives a bit of a feel for what we shall be getting when the film *Casino Royale* is released. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy6AELzw8jY&search=007%20trailer](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy6AELzw8jY&search=007%20trailer)



Stephen Colbert: funny man

**COLBERT ON DUBYA**

Watch the free video blog of Comedy Central's Stephen Colbert at the White House Correspondents Dinner, as he takes shots at the United States President's funny bone. The dinner is a long-standing annual tradition at the White House. Still, there are reports that not all who attended this year's edition thought Mr Colbert was funny. I wonder who? <http://video.freevideo.com/video/wm/AAC7FA18-2DDC-4D3E-B1BB-9D6CBD83E27F.htm>

**SPICE OF LIFE**

Here is just the gift for couples with "spice issues", like she likes it hot, he does not. Instead of a bottle to dispense the sauce, you get an item that allows you to twist the top to regulate the "hotness" of what comes out, going from mild to fiery. I want to see first how this works. It costs just US\$10. [www.davesgourmet.peachhost.com/ct\\_PRdaahs.htm](http://www.davesgourmet.peachhost.com/ct_PRdaahs.htm)



Oddcast artists can create an animated avatar based on a submitted photo.

SCMP Graphic

# Project your virtual self-image

As internet users spend more time inside online worlds, avatars are taking on animated dimensions

Michael Logan

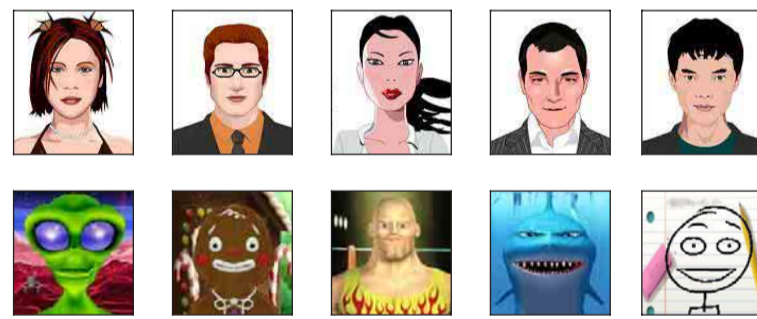
You are your avatar. The way you represent your virtual self says a lot about your mood, thoughts and personality.

There is the simple photo icon from the hiking holiday in Nepal ("I'm fitter than thou"); there is the image of Optimus Prime, a cartoon character popular two decades ago ("I'm a child of the 1980s"); many women prefer kittens ("I'm sweet and cute") and many men go for the laugh with silly poses ("I have a sense of humour").

Pity those who don't bother to choose an avatar at all ("I'm boring and unimaginative").

The computer-generated avatar made its first appearance as early as 1985 and traces its roots to video games. Now, as internet users spend more time inside online worlds, writing blogs and instant messaging, these avatars are taking on animated dimensions.

"Representing yourself through visuals is something you do on Skype [and other instant message programmes]," Oddcast founder



Superior interaction: avatars from SitePal (top row) and Logitech (bottom).

and chief executive Adi Sideman said. "It's just a matter of time until those visuals start to talk and have more flexibility in terms of how they look."

Oddcast offers to bloggers and businesses animated avatars that hint at the developments to come. The New York-based company's SitePal application allows users to create custom avatars and change their appearance, clothes and background setting.

Other features allow users to give a voice to their avatar through text-to-speech technology, upload-

ed MP3 files or phone recordings. Also, for a one-time fee, customers can submit a photo from which Oddcast artists will create a "photo realistic" or animated avatar.

Packages begin at about US\$10 per month for the service, and Oddcast has signed up 5,500 business clients so far.

Mr Sideman said providing



To hear the podcast with Adi Sideman, visit [podcasting.scmp.com](http://podcasting.scmp.com)

website visitors an "online sales person" to interact with had improved sales and click-through rates at businesses such as McAfee and Rentacar.com.

Some versions of SitePal avatars come with an Artificial Intelligence, giving them the ability to answer customer queries.

Mr Sideman saw responses growing more sophisticated as algorithms improved and as avatars were combined with other software, such as programmes that recommended products based on the buying behaviour of other customers.

"If you're coming from Germany it will speak to you in German, if you're coming from China it will speak to you in Chinese," he said.

"It will know exactly what your balance is. It will know to recommend to you the right product. It will know how to respond to you when you have a customer service question.

"This is the future of avatars. It's just a superior way of interacting through dialogue. Eventually, we're going to see a dialogue-based

interface prevalent on the internet."

Another interesting application allows web camera users to replace themselves with animated avatars during camera-shy moments.

The software, developed by peripherals maker Logitech, is free but compatible only with the company's high-end web cameras.

The avatars are not meant to represent the exact likeness of a person; most are cute or zany, ranging from unicorns or princesses to sharks and aliens.

Using face tracking technology, the camera registers a user's facial expressions to animate the avatar. The video effects also include "facial accessories", such as bunny ears, a pirate patch, a gas mask and a sombrero, which are grafted onto a person's image.

■ To see a demonstration of SitePal avatars, visit <http://logandemo.blogspot.com>

■ To see a demonstration of Logitech video effects, visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7Gn2TyEYHw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r7Gn2TyEYHw).

**Earful**  
Listening in on the telecoms industry  
Georgina Lee

**CHINA VERSUS MIDDLE EAST IN MOBILE AUCTION**

China Mobile and Kuwaiti mobile giant Mobile Telecommunications Co. (MTC) have grabbed international media attention in the past two weeks after emerging as the two finalists in the on-going auction for emerging-market mobile group Millicom International Cellular.

For MTC, a Middle-Eastern/African mobile giant already operating in 19 markets, the auction is the latest chapter in its bid to become a global player with 30 million users by 2011, up from 14.4 million at the end of last year.

MTC will spend three years in each of three phases of development through regional, international and global expansion.

A Dubai-based analyst covering MTC said it was on the verge of entering the third stage, after successfully acquiring Celtel last year, which brought MTC into the much-coveted African market.

Apart from bidding for Millicom in competition with China Mobile, MTC is also looking to bid for the third mobile licence in Egypt. It has also reached an agreement to buy V-mobile in Nigeria through Celtel for US\$1 billion.

With Millicom also having operations in South American markets, the analyst expressed surprise that MTC would make a foray so far from its home base, especially since South America is already dominated by major players such as America Movil and Telefonica.

"MTC's focus is in the Arab world," the analyst said. "If [MTC] buys Millicom in full it would be a bit of a surprise as Latin America is a difficult market. If they do enter South America, I expect them to do it in partnership with either a local player or a Chinese player."

Duncan Clark, managing director at consultancy BDA, also raised the possibility for China Mobile – if it won its bid for Millicom – to reach agreement with other operators to "break up" Millicom and sell parts of the company.

As Millicom now operates only in two markets in South America – Paraguay and Bolivia – the auction winner would have to be content with beginning as a relatively small player in the vast continent.

## TECH DIGEST



**FUEL FOR THOUGHT**

Casio displayed a prototype of its Proton Exchange Membrane fuel cell battery unit for notebook computers (pictured left) last week. The company claims it has four times the lifespan of earlier versions at about 20 hours of continuous use. The fuel cell, which contains methanol liquid on both sides, uses a micro-reactor to produce highly concentrated hydrogen to generate electric power when it reacts with oxygen. Casio expects to market the cell this year. *Agence France-Presse*

**SIT, GENIBO, SIT**

Sony's cute canine Aibo is no more, but a South Korean company wants to step into the gaping void with a new robot hound replete with watchdog camera built into its snout. Dubbed Genibo, Dasatech's robot dog is 30cm high, weighs 1.5kg and can respond to 100 verbal commands, including "sit," "roll over" and "wag tail". *Associated Press*

**WORLD'S BIGGEST PLASMA TV**

Big is not always better in the tech industry, but Panasonic looks to be on to something with its world-beating 103-inch plasma television. The three-of-a-kind prototype was on display in Kowloon Tong last week as part of a world tour taking in Europe, the United States and Asia. The 103-inch plasma screen packs more than 2 million pixels in a screen area of more than 31 sq ft.



**GETTING WIRED**

Local Wi-fi firm Y5Zone, in partnership with Intel, is giving away PDAs and smart phones to competition winners in a bid to promote wireless technology use in Hong Kong. The competition is open to all buyers of notebooks and selected smart phones with Centrino processors installed. Customers taking their notebooks to one of Y5Zone's 220 hotspots can play a Y5 slot game to win a prize. The competition began on May 1 and continues for six months.



**BATTERY-POWERED FLIGHT**

AA batteries have come a long way since they supercharged toy bunnies on the old television commercials. Recently, the world's first dry battery-powered aircraft completed a trial flight at the Fuji-river glider port in Shizuoka, Japan. Packed with 160 of Panasonic's Oxryde AA batteries, the 10-metre, 100kg plane – made of carbon fibre and styrofoam – carried a presumably nervous pilot about 200 metres on the test flight. *Agence France-Presse*