

U.S. Cellular unveils new mobile Internet plan, browser

By Dan Butcher

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U.S. Cellular has re-launched its open mobile Internet service using Novarra's newest Vision browser.

The new mobile Internet offering consists of full Web access, unlimited data and email. In addition, customers can also elect pay-as-you-go pricing options with the new Vision browser.

“U.S. Cellular prides itself in its high customer satisfaction and service level, and they also wish to drive data usage,” said Randy Cavaiani, vice president of marketing and business development for Novarra, Chicago, IL.

“When they chose to deliver mobile Internet, it had to be a very high-quality easy-to-use solution with broad appeal and reach,” he said. “Internet access is universally understood and appeals to all.

“When evaluating partners, elements of the decision criteria included breadth of content accessible, ability to complete tasks like on the desktop and, of course, speed.”

U.S. Cellular customers can access the full breadth of the Web, not just WAP sites.

Over the past year, customers of U.S. Cellular open Internet services, which are based upon Novarra's technology, have more than doubled, while page views have more than tripled.

“Novarra has worked with operators and content partners that believe ‘open internet’ via mobile phones to be a strategic and important service offering,” Mr. Cavaiani said. “U.S. Cellular was the first operator in the U.S. to offer open internet across their entire line of handsets starting in 2004 using Novarra.

“This was a natural continuation of our partnership,” he said. Today, we also work with market leaders including Turkcell and Vodafone in Europe, innovators like Hutchison’s Three Group and Yahoo to enhance their oneSearch and Yahoo Go mobile offerings.”

Novarra's Vision browser provides U.S. Cellular customers with Web and multimedia access, including advanced usability options such as SmartNav, Zoom, Snapshot and Password Manager.

SmartNav automatically identifies key content items such as login and search fields or main stories on information sites and provides single-click access to these items through a navigation toolbar in order to save users time and scrolling.

Zoom and Snapshot allow users to see a Web page and its images in a familiar desktop layout to orient themselves on a small screen and then zoom in to the area of the page or image they wish to focus upon.

Password Manager is a feature for access to sites where a login is required. These are some of the most frequently used sites like email, social networking and other online accounts.

However, as we know, a phone's keypad is less friendly for entering login information than a PC keyboard.

Password Manager allows a user to define all of these sites and login information once.

Then when they need to log in, the micro-browser can transfer this information automatically, assuming the user supplies his or her pre-defined security PIN code.

"Features like these and others make it easier for consumers to transfer their Internet habits to mobile and therefore drive adoption and ever increasing usage for the operator," Mr. Cavaiani said.

"These features are a demonstration of Novarra's commitment and expertise in delivering a superior user experience," he said. "Beyond just providing access to Internet sites on mobile phones, we understand that mobile consumers benefit from specialized mobile usability aids."

The Vision browser is optimized for the specific network, handset and Web activity performed.

The carrier-grade Vision server is a central network component for Web content transformation, network acceleration, content optimization and device-specific customization.

The Vision Mobile Dashboard offers one-click access to commonly visited Web sites, featured partner content and user personalization.

The Novarra Vision browser is open, non-proprietary and standards-compliant for interoperability.

Vision platform version 7.5 is a scalable mobile Internet platform for Web browsing, Flash and real-time streaming media.

Vision features and content like PC View, RSS, complex JavaScript and advertising, as well as carrier and handset optimization and personalization.

"Our platform supports mobile advertising and we have deployed it commercially in some markets, but not yet with U.S. Cellular," Mr. Cavaiani said. "However, all of our operator partners are considering how to best leverage mobile advertising with their services."

Novarra's patented architecture for Web content transformation and network optimization is open-standards-based and designed for mass-market, high-volume mobile consumer deployments.

Novarra believes that U.S. Cellular's pay-as-you-go option is a growing phenomenon.

"We see this as a global trend among all our operator partners for two reasons," Mr. Cavaiani said. "First, pay-as-you-go and lower-cost daily plans encourage a trial of the service and offer a path of upgrade to monthly subscriptions.

"Also, we know that some users prefer less frequent access and this type of plan in and of itself is always still a very sizeable and profitable source of data revenue," he said.

Novarra's Vision platform for mobile Internet and multimedia consists of a server in-network and an optional micro-browser.

"Since 2002, Novarra has been a pioneer in mobile browsers when we provided Palm with a browser for some of their first wireless PDAs," Mr. Cavaiani said. "To date, all customers have deployed the Vision server and most view the micro-browser as an additional component to deliver an even better user experience.

"The typical deployment scenario is to launch the server-only solution (that supports virtually all commercial mobile browsers) first to provide open Internet access to the entire subscriber base literally overnight," he said. "Then, an operator will later add the micro-browser.

Hutchison's Three Group has also deployed the Novarra micro-browser in markets like Hong Kong, Italy and Austria.

Other carriers are in various different stages of planning and deployment, according to Novarra.

"Our customers depend upon us to stay connected and expect a high-quality, reliable service," said Alan D. Ferber, chief marketing officer at U.S. Cellular, Chicago, in a written statement. "We are pleased with Novarra's expertise in delivering this intuitive mobile Internet experience."

Staff Reporter Dan Butcher covers banking and payments, carrier networks, commerce, database/CRM, manufacturers, music and software and technology. Reach him at dan@mobilemarketer.com.