

Novarra unveils Vision micro-browser 8.0

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Internet mobility company Novarra is introducing the latest version of its Vision micro-browser at this week's CTIA conference in Las Vegas. The new release comes after Novarra formed an agreement with Verizon at MWC to optimize its mobile web for full HTML mobile sites regardless of whether the device supports a full HTML browser.

Vision includes full web browsing, widgets, streaming video and mobile Internet services. Coupled with Novarra's analytics service, operators can track customer usage data to monetize and enhance their existing services. Other new features of the browser include pan and zoom functionality, personal password manager, touch-to-focus for touch screens, enhanced fonts and content prioritization, an embedded widget runtime engine and icon-based on-device portal, improved SSL handling and server bypass with direct mobile banking mode for secure site access and transactions. Vision also supports multimedia, Flash and streaming web video support and core performance upgrades to improve page load time and over-the-air data payload.

The open standards-based platform is designed for high volume mobile consumer deployments across all handsets, but Novarra is focusing on the smartphone at CTIA. The company is aiming to enhance features including the HTML browser and keyboards with PC level penetration on new and existing handsets, including from LG, Samsung, Motorola, Nokia, Apple and Google.

"Despite of the fact these devices have capable HTML browsers with all the bells and whistles, they have performance issues – even the iPhone on 2.5G had performance issues," said Randy Cavaiani, Novarra's vice president of marketing and business development. "Since we offload the handset and mobile device, we inherently increase the speed, a consumer benefit, and the operator benefit is we reduce the over-the-air payload by 90%."

Novarra can also fill the holes that devices have in functionality, Cavaiani said, citing the iPhone 3G's lack of Flash support as an example. Novarra servers can process Flash and then deliver a version the device can understand. For the iPhone, which requires the YouTube app to enable Flash video content, Novarra offers real-time transcoding so that when a user goes to any Web site, it detects the presence of the site, transcodes the streaming video in real time and delivers it to the device.

Novarra adopts the Java-like mentality of write once and run anywhere. Through owning its own server, the company can adapt widgets depending on the capability of the device it is porting it to. For widgets, there are three fundamental scenarios, Cavaiani said. Novarra can take an available widget and make it fully functional on a device with no run-time widget engine, deliver that same widget to a Novarra browser or take an industry-standard widget, like Opera on Nokia, and create a package on the server that can then be sent down to devices. Essentially, Novarra provides a simple standards-based software development kit so widgets can be written only once and posted to the server for distribution, Cavaiani said.

“[Verizon] will likely deploy our Version 8 browser on their higher-end devices with big screens, good user experience or touch screen, but the native browser is not very powerful,” Cavaiani said. “The fundamental hardware platform is not up to the capability of the Google G1 or iPhone. By simply adding our server into the mix, we can increase performance and functionality.”