
DO YOU HEAR WHAT I HEAR?

Bluetooth is becoming available this fall and it is hitting the telecommunications market in a big way. Even though this chip technology connects devices that are within 30 feet of each other, it will soon make a dent in an already wireless industry.

With around 2,000 companies working with the Bluetooth technology, new products are getting developed so quickly that consumers will have to scramble to get their Christmas lists done early this year.

LAPTOP TO CELL PHONE

Laptop to cell phone will likely be the first connection under Bluetooth standards. This provides an efficient way to check your e-mail if you're at the airport or if you're watching your favorite sports team play live. The Internet is brought to the consumer and IBM is one of its pioneers, releasing a Bluetooth computer card later this month with a price tag of \$189. Motorola and Ericsson expect to have Bluetooth cell phones available just in time for Christmas. Ericsson will also offer a cordless headset so that phone users can have their hands free as they drive down the highway or wander around their offices.

PRICE IS AN OBJECT

The Ericsson headset might go for around \$300, because it will need to include a Bluetooth attachment for the cell phone as well as the headset. The first Motorola Bluetooth phone will retail for around \$325, plus up to \$190 for a special computer card.

The prices may seem steep at the moment, but they are expected to come down with new products ready to hit the market. Ericsson's first Bluetooth phone will not be a matter of adding a card, but simply modifying a chip already in its cell phones. This will drive down cost and increase consumer awareness about the technology's minimal adjustments.

IBM ENTERS MARKET

IBM is pitching the idea of a new generation of laptops that will have a Bluetooth antenna built in around the display screen. Instead of an external device that has to slip into a slot, the wireless technology will be hidden inexpensively inside the case. Laptops will continue to become smaller and lighter because they won't need as many connecting ports in back. IBM is also introducing BlueDrekar, a software driver that lets developers write Linux applications that support Bluetooth.

FORD EXPLORES

Ford Forschungszentrum Aachen (FFA), Ford's German research center, and Elsa, the German information technology firm, unveiled a working prototype of a Bluetooth-enabled car at the Intelligent Transport Systems congress. The car has been wired up to support the Bluetooth personal area network (PAN) system, complete with a notebook PC that is hooked into an onboard PC that has been integrated into the car's systems.

3COM CONNECTS

3Com plans to ship its first three Bluetooth products early next year, which includes hardware that can be affixed to desks and conference rooms, so people can use the wireless technology at the office. 3Com plans to ship notebook PC cards and universal serial bus adapters that have the wireless technology built in, so computers can support Bluetooth.

BLUE CHRISTMAS AFTER ALL

As one can see, companies are handling Bluetooth technology today efficiently and some inventive products will be released before the end of the year. This is just the beginning of what might become a revolution in wireless networking. So leave plenty of room in your stockings because this might just be a Blue Christmas after all.