



■ Quite a few things are in store for consumers in 2008. Here's a run down of what to expect.

By ZAM KARIM and JO TIMBUONG

THERE should be plenty to cheer about for Malaysian consumers this year especially with new telecommunication companies entering the fray.

One such company is U Mobile. Unveiled last September, the new service provider, formerly known as MiTV Networks Sdn Bhd, is set to offer 3G telecommunications and mobile data services soon under the 018 prefix.

U Mobile was one of the recipients of the 3G spectrum licences in a second round of 3G tender exercises in March 2006. The other recipient was Time DotCom.

One of the services that will be delivered through its 3G spectrum is Mobile Live TV, which is currently under user trials.

At the moment, Celcom Communications Bhd's is supplementing U Mobile's 3G coverage as it progressively rolls out its services in 2008.

Under its Mobile Live TV service, users can watch programmes from international broadcaster Bloomberg as well as local television stations 8TV, NTV7 and TV3 on their mobile phones.

U Mobile has also secured the rights to screen Trace TV, Europe's urban music, lifestyle and feature channel as well as Channel News Asia.

The quality of the broadcast is said to be of DVD-like clarity.

One thing that would probably hinder the adoption of U Mobile's Mobile Live TV offerings would be the price of mobile phones — the price of a mobile phone with Mobile TV features could set consumers back by about RM1,800 — and its own area coverage.

During its official launch last year, U Mobile announced that it would focus offering coverage for its service in the Klang Valley first before venturing into other parts of the country.

Maxis and Celcom are also 3G licensees and have advertised Mobile TV as one of its offerings as well.

Maxis' offering is on-demand and while Celcom announced that it would offer the Mobile Live TV at last year's CommunicAsia in Singapore though it has not materialised yet.

According to Celcom's public relations agency, the telco is still testing the platform.

Waiting on WiMAX

2008 also holds promise for improved wireless broadband Internet access for Malaysians.

Last March, the Government awarded the WiMAX licences to four players: Asiaspace Dotcom Sdn Bhd, Redtone-CNIX Broadband Sdn Bhd, Bizsurf (M) Sdn Bhd (a unit of YTL Corp) and Packet One Networks Sdn Bhd (formerly known as MIB Comm).

Bizsurf, MIB Comm and Asiaspace Dotcom will cover peninsular Malaysia while Redtone-CNIX Broadband will serve Sabah and Sarawak.

The Internet access speed through WiMAX is expected to be no less than 1Mbps (equivalent to about 1,000Kbps). In comparison, dial-up Internet access connects at speeds of up to 56Kbps.

The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) also stipu-



EASY TO USE:
A woman trying out the Mak Cik PC prototype. The PC by Mimos, is a lightweight device that plugs into a TV and allows users access to the Internet wirelessly.

A LOOK AT THE YEAR AHEAD



WATCH THIS: U Mobile's Mobile Live TV, which enables users to watch programmes from Bloomberg as well as local television stations, is currently under user trials. — Bloomberg



BETTER ACCESS: People surfing wirelessly using their laptops. 2008 holds the promise of improved wireless broadband Internet access for Malaysians.

lated that the wireless 1Mbps service should be available at "an affordable price" and expects services to be rolled out to 25% of the population by the end of last year, when it handed out the contract.

However, progress reports were not available at press time.

Meanwhile, the Kuala Lumpur Wireless Metropolitan project kicked off with the objective of making the city go fully wireless by September.

As part of the initiative, 1,500 hot spots will

be identified in the city to be furnished with WiMAX.

Cheaper laptops

Last year, Nicholas Negroponte's One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project moved through its gears in an effort to create low-cost computers for children in poor nations.

As the year wore on, this initiative seemed to inspire more such projects. Before long, chip giant Intel Corp introduced its Classmate PC, a low-cost PC for children in

»The Kuala Lumpur Wireless Metropolitan project kicked off with the objective of making the city go fully wireless by September«

developing countries and, to date, ten Malaysian schools have since signed up for the company's pilot project.

Mimos Bhd, the Malaysian applied-research body is also getting in on the act with its "Mak-Cik" personal computer.

The Mak-Cik PC, currently in prototype

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AFFORDABLE: Taiwan model Freda Fang showing off the Asus Eee PC. The Eee PC costs RM1,299, and may just signal a new breed of affordable laptops to be introduced in the coming year. — Reuters

WHAT TO EXPECT

> FROM PII

stage, is a lightweight device that is plugs into a TV and allows users access to the Internet wirelessly.

It is expected to be priced at about RM500 and will be able in the second quarter of this year.

Taiwanese company Asus is one of the first PC makers to come up with a commercial version of affordable laptops available to the masses.

The Asus Eee PC 4G sub-notebook, made available late last year, weighs less than 1kg, features a 7in (800 x 480pixels) LCD screen and includes stereo speakers.

The Eee PC costs RM1,299, and may just signal a new breed of affordable laptops to be introduced in the coming year.

Chips ahoy

The two chip titans AMD and Intel also look set to battle it out later in the year with their upcoming processor and architecture offerings: AMD's Phenom and Intel's Nehalem.

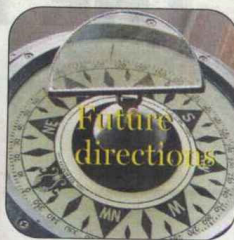
Nehalem is a brand new architecture that leverages Intel's Core microarchitecture to bring cutting-edge performance advantages, power efficiency and important new server features to market.

According to Intel, the Nehalem chips will be the first to sport the QuickPath Interconnect system, which includes an integrated memory controller — something previously seen only in AMD processors.

AMD considers its upcoming quad core Phenom processors to be the first truly quad core chips as these processors have all cores on the same piece of silicon wafer, as opposed to two dual cores patched together.

Unified communications

Unified communications (UC) solutions fuse together disparate communications systems, media, devices and applications, enabling corporations to collaborate more effectively, both in and away from the office.



It facilitates the streamlining of office communications by integrating legacy communications tool such as private branch exchange (PBX) systems with an ever-widening range of communications devices, including mobile phones, handhelds, laptops and desktop PCs.

The solution's primary usefulness is it provides the ability to reach an employee through a single contact number on any device or system including phone, instant messaging and e-mail.

According to analysts, last year was spent creating awareness about UC and creating the building blocks that work the system. This year, it is anticipated, will be the year for UC adoption.

Many companies, including tech powerhouses Microsoft Corp and IBM Corp, have begun developing and improving their UC offerings.

Microsoft chairman Bill Gates said the company's software-driven solutions eliminate the boundaries between the various modes of communications customers use throughout the day.

"It provides a single identity that spans all of the ways people can reach you, and you'll be able to move a conversation seamlessly between voice, text and video and from one device to another as your location and information-sharing needs change," he said.

Going green

More companies are also expected to step up their "green" initiative as environmental threat awareness increases.

Some of those companies that

have done their part in promoting and producing greener products last year included Nokia, Hewlett-Packard, Dell and Hitachi.

A few did not stop at only using environmental friendly components but have expanded their initiatives in other areas such as energy efficiency, recycling, packaging as well as educating their staff about environmental issues.

Some of these organisations are also beginning to realise that going green can reduce cost and helps create a better reputation for the company's public relations efforts.

Free music

Finnish phone giant Nokia recently announced that it will begin offering mobile music downloads for its products.

This year, upcoming Nokia phones will "Come With Music." This enables customers to download songs from the company's online music store for free for a year.

What's interesting about the Nokia's offer is after the one-year period ends, users can keep the songs that they have downloaded.

Currently, there are over two million songs available at the website.

Nokia has already got Universal Music Group International on board and is in talks with other major labels to expand its catalogue.

The songs are DRM-protected and users can only transfer them to up to five different devices.

It is still not clear, though, how much Nokia will be getting out of this and how much it will charge for the songs after one year free subscription expires.

The initiative aims to reduce illegal music download and increase mobile phone usage for downloading music.

The move is likely to put pressure on Apple's iTunes music store.

If Nokia manages to successfully pull off its latest project, it is expected that other similar free music download schemes will emerge.