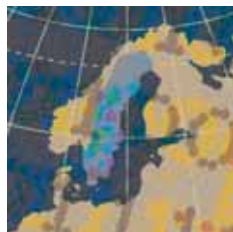


**Format wars over mobile TV**

*Peter Feuilherade, Media Analyst, BBC Monitoring*

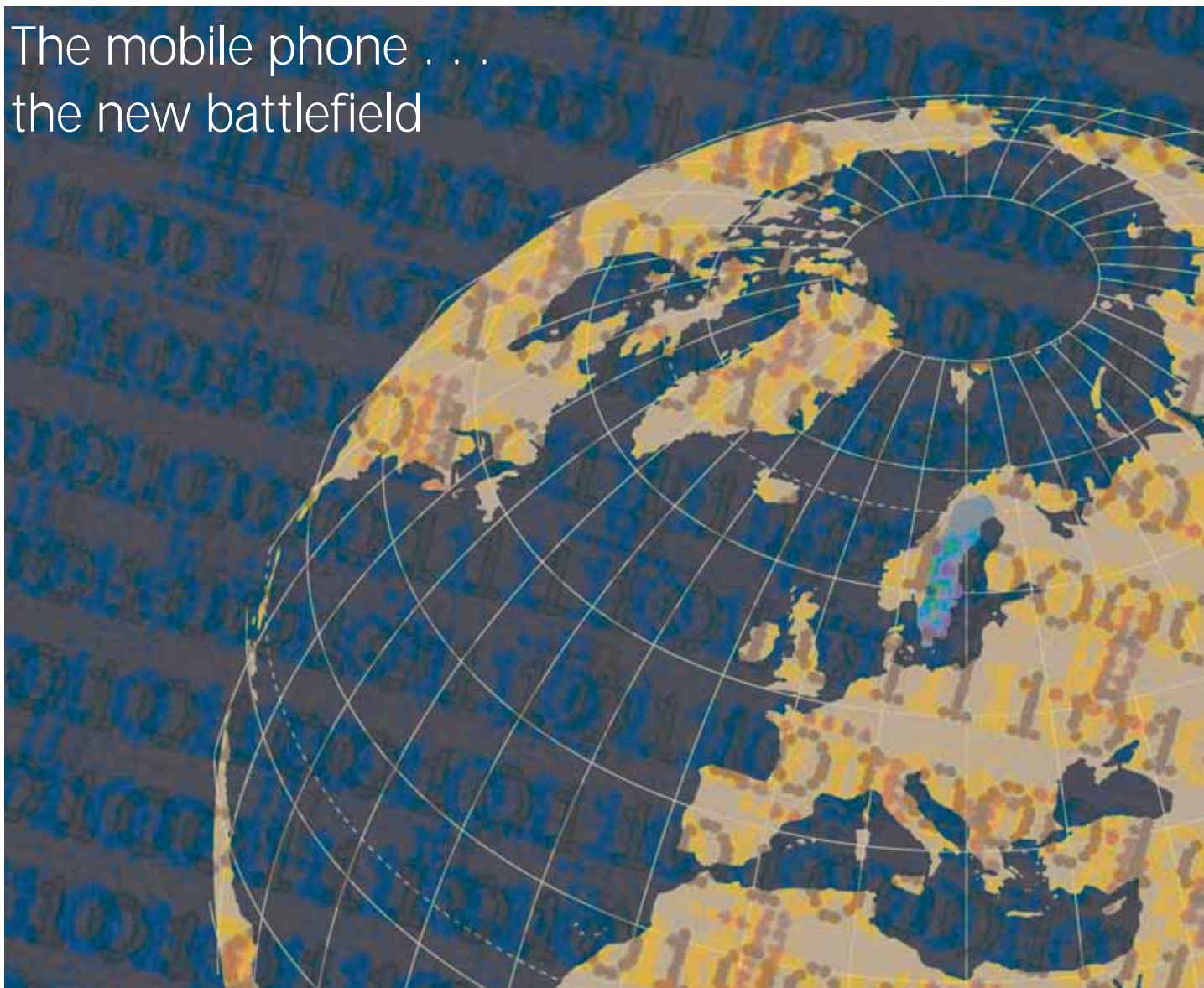


# Forma

**Peter Feuilherade**

*Media Analyst, BBC Monitoring*

The mobile phone . . .  
the new battlefield



# t wars

## over mobile TV

South Korean giants such as Samsung and LG touted new generation mobile phones that allowed users to watch live multi-channel TV on the move during the International Broadcasting Convention (IBC) in Amsterdam.

In their push into the European mobile TV market, they see next year's football World Cup in Germany as a crucial launch pad.

But the Koreans face strong competition from European manufacturers such as Nokia. More than 30 companies keen to promote broadcasting to mobile handsets exhibited at this year's IBC.

Despite the high hopes of manufacturers, live TV services on mobile phones are still in their infancy in most parts of the world.

### Test

At the World Athletic Championships in Helsinki in August, the world's biggest handset maker Nokia combined with Finnish telecoms groups and broadcasters to test mobile real-time broadcasts on a smartphone equipped with an experimental TV receiver.

The 300-strong trial panel brought in mixed reviews, with complaints that

the device was inelegant and colour rendition was poor, although images were sharp.

South Korea's top mobile operator SK Telecom and its affiliate TU Media launched a satellite pay-TV service to mobile phones in May this year.

But TU Media admits that customer take-up has been sluggish, and blames this on high prices for combined phone/satellite TV handsets, costing up to €300.

### Small is beautiful

Trials have shown that conventional TV schedules do not adapt well to mobile TV, which needs short and self-contained sequences.

Analysts say the key message about video programming for mobile phones is to think short and limit content to 90 seconds.

The TV application must not impede the mobile phone functions.

Another must is interactivity – the ability to use the phone as a back channel, for voting or linking to websites.

There are further issues that need ironing out such as improving battery



performance for handsets, ensuring reliable mobile TV reception, and using technology that will not increase the size of existing phones.

### Confusion

Rival technological standards could deepen consumer confusion. "Numerous regional variations will likely lead to dis-economies of scale," warned Dermot Nolan, author of a new *Screen Digest* report on the prospects for mobile-to-TV.

Currently, the European market is dominated by digital video broadcasting for handheld (DVB-H) technology developed by Nokia.

Mobile TV services with DVB-H technology are being piloted in Spain, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, South Africa and

the US . It is the current favourite to become the most common worldwide standard for mobile phone TV.

Ranged against DVB-H is the competing Digital Multimedia Broadcasting (DMB) standard. Originally developed in Korea, DMB is based on the digital audio broadcasting (DAB) standard, but can deliver video, pictures and data alongside audio.

“There is a very strong battle between Korea and Europe,” said Jorma Laiho, director for technology at Finnish broadcaster YLE.

## A sporting chance

Media analysts say that when mobile TV services become mainstream, the big sellers will be football, comedy shows and adult content.

“The opportunities for broadcasters like the BBC with vast archives and pay-TV operators to repackage their content are tremendous,” said Peter Simpson, chief technologist at British manufacturer Pace Micro Technology.

But a report by Swedish analysts Berg Insight predicts that in Western Europe, mobile TV will not be a major contributor to booming mobile content revenues until at least 2012, when transmissions are forecast to reach broadcast quality.

Research in Germany shows 78% of consumers already think mobile TV is a good or excellent idea and 82% are willing to pay €12.50 a month.

Another commercial mobile TV pilot in Helsinki found that 41% of participants would be willing to purchase mobile TV services, and half thought that a fixed monthly fee of €10 was reasonable.

In the US, by contrast, two separate reports by In-Stat US and Parks Associates concluded that only one in eight consumers was interested in

paying for live TV or video content on mobile platforms.

But Nokia’s vice-president for multimedia, Richard Sharp, is bullish about mobile TV.

“Mobile TV will be a new distribution platform that will allow the media industry to expand its audience, widen prime time and re-use popular content,” he told IBC delegates.

Handset manufacturers continue to see sports fans as the early adopters of mobile TV.

And if the 2006 World Cup does not live up to expectations, a bigger commercial prize lies only two years down the road, at the Olympic Games in Beijing. By then, perhaps, broadcasters and mobile operators will also have worked out how to share the revenues.

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