UN Sets Stage For Fast New Mobile Devices

John Heilprin, Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — A United Nations telecom meeting has approved the next generation of mobile technology, which experts say will make devices 500 times faster than 3G smartphones and eliminate the wait time between the tap of a finger and the appearance of a Web page.

The technology will be used immediately for planning changes to equipment but it could take two years to show up on consumers smartphone, tablets and other devices because of the time it takes to get to production, International Telecommunication Union spokesman Sanjay Acharya said Thursday.

The differences between present technology and the new standards for IMT-Advanced are like comparing dial-up Internet to fiber-optic cables, say officials at the U.N. agency responsible for information and communication technology.

"This means absolutely no time to get a page open," said Francois Rancy, head of the agency's radiocommunication bureau.

The technology hasn't been available until now because the U.N. must first approve of the international standards for its use.

The IMT-Advanced system uses radio-frequency spectrum much more efficiently, and devices built with it will need less bandwidth to access the Internet, stream videos and transfer data. That means those devices could deliver blazing fast messages, video chats and even high-definition TV.

The new standards for what some call "true" 4G, or fourth generation of mobile wireless standards, were approved by the ITU Radiocommunication Assembly at its meeting this week in Geneva. ITU set the requirements for 4G service in 2009.

In December 2010, ITU said some current technologies such as LTE and WiMax could be billed as forerunners to 4G, even though they don't meet the requirements of the IMT-Advanced system.

The 2G, 3G and 4G families of standards have been set by the International Telecommunication Union to define the services and download speed provided by networks.

The current 3G mobile technology, known as International Mobile Telecommunications, has been widely used since 2000.

Rancy said the new IMT-Advanced systems will deliver "a much higher quality and a much higher bit rate, typically of the order of 100 megabits per second."

A bit is a measure of data, so the new technology would allow devices to obtain data fast enough that most TV shows could be downloaded within about 20 seconds, and CDs within about a minute.

"This is a huge leap," Rancy said. "This is what people are really asking for now."

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