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POST

The Bright Mobile Future

Joining a cast of thousands, technophiles last week gathered in Las Vegas for CTIA's 2010 convention marking the show's 25th anniversary. What better way to celebrate than showcasing an inspiring display of innovation fueled by a global industry still in its infancy.

As I walked the exhibition floor, I was amazed at how quickly wireless technology is progressing — not only with handsets themselves, but also with the countless ways these pocket size devices can be deployed. No longer are tech firms simply developing applications that entertain (although [Docomo's eye-controlled earphones](#) were pretty spectacular), the truly inspiring applications are those focused on public safety, healthcare, sustainable energy — applications for the elderly, for the handicapped, for people with chronic diseases, for smart grid services and for first responders. This is where wireless technology is really shaping the smarter future.

One of my first stops was to see [Vocel's PillPhone](#). The software, which reminds patients to take medication, is available on many wireless handsets through several carriers and has already been approved by the FDA.

With nearly 90 percent of Americans as wireless subscribers, software engineers are responding to the ubiquity of mobile devices by making them ever more valuable tools in the lives of consumers. A pill reminder may seem simple enough, but for patients prescribed multiple medications, or for the elderly, medication at the right time, in the right dose, can mean life or death.

New applications are shaping the way we manage our lives and wireless devices allow for greater mobility and greater freedom. Another prime example is [iVisit's LookTel](#), a new object recognition application.

Although the uses of such technology are myriad, the LookTel opens up opportunities for the visually impaired. From scanning items on a grocery list to recognizing denominations of dollar bills, this technology helps the visually impaired navigate through many day-to-day tasks.

This search for greater independence — for self-sufficiency both as a nation and as individuals — is something of a catalyst for current innovation. New technologies should enable us to better use and better allocate our own resources. Qualcomm had a great demo of how mobile networks can help integrate electric vehicles into the smart grid. The company's time lapse display illustrated how wireless technology can help manage energy usage from three sources: wind power, solar power and the traditional electrical grid. Throughout the day, the system could actually assess which energy source is most efficient — either one of the renewable sources on a windy or sunny day or the traditional source when the other two aren't available.

This year's convention was aptly named Mobile Life. In this new age, information will follow us. If you still doubt our "connectedness," I would recommend checking out one of my favorite presentations at CTIA — [Ericsson's "Connected Tree"](#) that senses changes in the electromagnetic field around it as people pass and sends updates reflecting its mood directly to its Twitter account, [ConnectedTree](#). In the mobile era, truly everything can and likely will be connected.

Consumers have high expectations for speed, efficiency and convenience. Wireless carriers, equipment manufacturers, applications developers and software engineers are working tirelessly to meet and exceed these expectations. We shouldn't take for granted how far the industry and the technologies, investors, and innovators who have helped sustain it, have come in such a short period. Wireless has evolved from a luxury item in the 80's to the defining factor of 21st century landscape. And the innovation race has just begun.

Jonathan Spalter, chairman of Mobile Future, has been founding CEO of leading technology, media, and research companies, including Public Insight, Snocap, and Atmedica Worldwide. He served as an advisor to and spokesperson for Vice President Al Gore during the Clinton administration.

Mobile Future is a 501(c)(4) coalition comprised of and supported by technology businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals dedicated to advocating for an environment in which innovations in wireless technology and services are enabled and encouraged. For a full list of members and sponsors and to learn more about the coalition, go to www.mobilefuture.org.

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