



Lines Drawn For Wireless Battle

Irish Broadband has become the latest telecoms firm to stake its claim for the emerging mobile broadband market. Already a player in the fixed wireless market, Irish Broadband will begin rolling out mobile services in the first quarter of next year, which will allow users to access broadband while on the move.

The company has invested heavily in WiMax, a new wireless standard that is being promoted by Intel and several other industry heavyweights. There are several variants of the technology, but standards for the version supporting mobile access were finally confirmed late last year, meaning equipment will begin shipping shortly.

While waiting on equipment, Irish Broadband has been rolling out pre-WiMax technology on its network which will be software upgradeable to the standardised version. The company is already demonstrating PC cards for laptops, which will connect to the Irish Broadband service when in range. Looking further down the line, the company is anticipating the launch of the Intel 'Rosedale' chip that will incorporate WiMax access and be used in devices such as laptops and PDAs.



Neil Parkinson (right), chief executive of Irish Broadband, with fellow executives Mike Stacey (left) and Jeremy Nel

The company is also looking forward to the availability of WiMax enabled mobile phones, one of which has already been debuted by Samsung.

In going after the mobile market, the company will be in competition with Vodafone, which is launching its own upgraded 3G service complete data cards for laptops and unlimited access for €49 a month. It will also be competing with fixed wireless rival Digiweb (see page 52), which is planning on launching its own mobile broadband service early next year. While Irish Broadband chief executive Neil Parkinson reckons competing technologies can exist side-by-side, it looks like it will be a crowded market.

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