



Nokia to notch up growth

Vice President for South East Asia Pacific talks to The Daily Star

NAFID IMRAN AHMED

Although Nokia is the world's largest handset manufacturer by volume, it is facing challenges as they wish to remain the market leader and the handset vendor of choice. Neil Gordon, the company's vice president of sales in South East Asia Pacific, told The Daily Star in an interview during his visit to Bangladesh recently.

"I think we address all segments of society, price points, all form factors and so, the ambition is that we remain the market leader and be the brand of choice. Brand preference and trust element is important to us."

On recent strategic changes in the Bangladesh market, Gordon said local presence is crucial to Nokia as they have local presence that is stronger than any other vendor anywhere else in the world and that is not particular to Bangladesh, but to any market.

"If we have changed the reporting lines to regions or sub-regions, the fact is we remain and continue to build our local presence here in Bangladesh. That becomes more important as we move into the application space, the developer ecosystem space," Gordon said.

"We have our country manager here in Bangladesh who reports to our general manager based in Thailand, but that does not change our local presence."

"You cannot develop and deliver local applications sitting in Singapore. You need to be here on the ground, engage with local partners who can be operators, consumers, or developers," he said.

Nokia has been working with local communities beyond just handset sales.

"We have done quite well in bringing certain tools and capabilities to the devices that enhance people's everyday life, not just the wealthy but all walks of life," he said.

"We have something called Ovi Life Tools, which was launched in Indonesia, China, Nigeria and India, that enhances the lives of everyday regular people. CSR is also very important to us."

According to Gordon, Nokia LifeTools will be launched in Bangladesh during the course of this year. "Nokia has good experience from other parts of the world. It's really about solving real life problems."

For some people, getting stock prices everyday from Wall Street is a must have, or others,



Neil Gordon

crop prices are a must have. In addition, there is education and healthcare and people having access to information. It creates a community environment as well, he said.

The ecosystem for the LifeTools is similar, but the feeds are different, you need to have some sort of a call centre to track prices, and the service is SMS based.

Gordon said Nokia is willing to engage and work with local developers to identify the needs of the local people.

"When it comes to developers, as we have done elsewhere in the world, we have a community of developers and we make sure that we put infrastructure, tools and trainings in place," he said.

"We make sure we put the billing capability in place. It's one thing to bring an app store or a market place but we expect consumers to have credit cards to access the content. Sure you can have free content, but we need to make that as easy as possible. Then there is this education element, we want consumers

downloading a lot of content, but not to get a shock at the end of the month by running out of credit on their pre-paid account."

"We have been successful, particularly in Asia, in building relationships with operators to provide operator billing. So you can access and download applications using your phone bill and that's important because consumers tend to trust the operators as a billing engine. Nokia is well renowned as a trusted brand and consumers must feel comfortable when they are parting with their hard earned money. So we'll put in the operator billing system and that sort of completes the ecosystem."

When asked why Nokia chose Microsoft as a partner for their smartphones, Gordon said there were a number of options. "We recognised that in order to compete with Android and Apple, we would need to partner and there was a series of choices to be made."

"With Android we did not feel there would be sufficiently enough opportunity to differentiate. When you look at the number of vendors

today who have chosen that platform, their ability to differentiate is limited."

"The second part of the equation is, what assets does the company hold today and what would be the best combination of those assets with the partner. And if you consider Microsoft, they bring assets, such as a trusted and a strong enterprise brand," he added.

He said the biggest challenge of the current version of Windows Phone is distribution; they do not have a distribution and retail presence. "Perhaps somewhat in the US, but beyond that they don't have it."

So what happens to Symbian? "Well, Symbian will continue to exist during that transition period. It is still a very good, viable consumer proposition and we will continue to invest in it, enhancing the Symbian experience during the transition to Windows Phone," he said.

"The important thing to recognise for Nokia as a company is that we offer choice. We are not targeting one consumer space. Some of our competitors have chosen a rather expensive end of the spectrum. We on the other hand offer entry devices and high-end devices and also offer something in between. I don't think that will change even with the Windows Phone, because there will also be a range of devices and not a single device."

He says there has been a lot of focus on smartphones and the chosen platform with Windows Phone going forward. "But in this part of the world, here in Bangladesh, a vast majority of phones are mobile phones not smartphones and that will be true within my responsible area in Asia Pacific where the majority of the business is in mobile phones."

"And that's not to say that the trend is changing toward smartphones, but there will always be a big portion of the population that does not have the financial means to afford a smartphone. But why should they be less catered for? And that's very important for us, so we continue to see heavy investment in our mobile phones portfolio," Gordon added.

"I think when you look at markets like Bangladesh, which has low internet penetration from a fixed line perspective, people's first internet experience will be on mobile devices and you will start to see some enhancement coming to our Series 40. We will make that internet experience as good as it

can be, by bringing in a browser experience that we believe is far superior to the competition and consumers will have a true internet experience with those lower end devices, which will also bring the line of services that we have on Ovi Store for our Series 40 devices."

"Ovi Store will continue to exist, cater to all and will be the marketplace for applications. It is intelligent enough to identify the devices, so whether you are downloading for Series 60 or 40, Windows Phone or a Meego device, the store will know what kind of device you are downloading for and provide accordingly," he said.

"Of course, the Windows marketplace is there as well, so consumers again will have choice. We have a massive base of Symbian devices and Ovi will continue to support those in the years to come."

On company strategies to tackle competition from Chinese handsets, Gordon said from a number of angles, "the decision to go with Windows phone on the smartphone segment has freed up a lot of RnD. So we will invest more on mobile phones from technology, innovation and price perspectives. We will see more coming from Nokia on that space."

"When it comes to the 'Schengen ecosystem', yes there has been a lot coming to the market. Our focus is on quality and we will not compromise on materials used on the devices. There are many metals and substances we have banned from use in our devices. Whether it costs or not, is not the issue, we do not compromise on the quality of the devices," he added.

"The other aspect is that we invest heavily on after market sales. So if you buy a Nokia device, irrespective of where you are in the world, you can rest assured that if something happens to the device, you are in easy reach of a care centre. And we are investing in developers and operator billing so that the end to end experience is there."

"Certainly, we are facing competition in the lower end, but I think during the course of this year, new Nokia mobile phones are coming to the market. Consumers will enjoy fresh new designs, new innovations, and enhanced browser and user experience. You will see a number of dual SIM devices from Nokia coming in this year," the VP said.

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Samsung brings Galaxy Pop

IT.TELECOM DESK

Samsung Mobile has introduced Samsung Galaxy Pop in Bangladesh, says a press release.

The newest member of the Galaxy series runs on Android Froyo. It comes with 3.4 inch LCD, 3MP camera, 2GB of memory and 3.5mm ear jack.

It offers Google voice actions and Quick Office document viewer, all powered

by a 600MHz processor.

Users of the Pop will have access to limitless entertainment through over 150,000 applications from Android Market and Samsung Apps, while quick communication is enabled via QuickType by SWYPE text input.

The smartphone comes equipped with WiFi connec-



tivity and Social Hub, which lets users view their contacts, SNS, IM and email together in an integrated one-page layout, keeping them constantly connected.

Its 1200 mAh battery supports over 9.3 hours of talk time. The Galaxy Pop has price tag of Tk 15,500

Microsoft, Toyota team up on digital auto network



REUTERS, Seattle

Microsoft Corp and Toyota Motor Corp unveiled a plan on Wednesday to work together on bringing Internet-connected services to Toyota's cars across the world.

The world's biggest software company and the biggest automaker said they were investing about \$12 million (1 billion yen) in Toyota Media Service Co, a Toyota unit that handles its digital offerings for customers.

Toyota is planning to set up a network based on Microsoft's Azure "cloud computing" platform by 2015, which would allow customers across the world access to Toyota's digital services, such as GPS, multimedia, and managing power on electric and hybrid vehicles.

One of the services Toyota is planning will monitor and integrate a person's power usage across the home and car to maximize efficiency, for example by automatically charging electric cars when

power rates are lowest.

The chief advantage for Toyota is that it will be able to offer Internet-delivered services to customers in all 170 countries it sells in, through the use of one Microsoft cloud platform, rather than having to set up networks and data centers in each country.

Toyota President Akio Toyoda traveled to Microsoft's headquarters near Seattle to announce the partnership alongside Microsoft Chief Executive Steve Ballmer. Toyoda said he was at first doubtful about leaving Japan as the company struggles to get operations back to normal after last month's earthquake, but said working on future business opportunities was the best way to help Japan's recovery.

Microsoft has worked with Toyota for more than a decade, but Wednesday's announcement signals an escalation of their co-operation. The software company has recently focused most of its auto industry technology efforts on Ford Motor Co.

TECHPHOTO

Robo dog

Génibo, a robotic dog produced by the Korean company Dasarobot is exhibited during the "Innovo" fair in Lyon.

PHOTO: AFP

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