

EE Times: Latest News
Near-field comm to hit mass market in '07

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SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. — Philips Semiconductors' top executive predicted Tuesday (March 14) that, by 2010, half of all new wireless handsets shipped will contain embedded near-field communication (NFC) technology, a short-range wireless connectivity technology that enables two-way interactions among electronic devices.

In an exclusive interview with EE Times following his keynote address at the 9th Annual Semico Summit here, Frans van Houten, president and CEO of Philips Semiconductors, said he expects NFC-enabled headsets to begin hitting the market on a large scale in 2007. A small number of Nokia 3220 mobile phones equipped with Philips' NFC chips are already available and in use at an NFC trial at Philips Arena in Atlanta, as well as other trials in Hanau, Germany, and Caen, France.

Much of the focus on NFC technology has centered on its ability to enable contactless payments using secure point-of-sale terminals. But van Houten emphasized Tuesday that contactless payment is "only one of several useful applications," enabled by NFC, including simplifying the setup of longer-range wireless technologies such as Bluetooth and WiFi. For example, van Houten said, users can synchronize a Bluetooth session by simply holding NFC-enabled devices up to one another. During the keynote, van Houten said users would be able to contactlessly download information from NFC-embedded posters advertising events, such as concerts or sporting events.

According to van Houten, NFC technology is secure, employing the higher-end security features of smart cards. NFC-enabled wireless devices also offer the option of additional security provided by pass codes, he said.

Echoing one of the themes of his keynote address earlier in the day, van Houten said proliferation of NFC will require a tight, complex ecosystem of handset makers, service providers, banks, technology providers and others. The NFC Forum, a non-profit industry association formed to push NFC, already boasts more than 60 members, including such diverse companies as Philips, Sony, Texas Instruments, Microsoft and Mastercard International.

"We need a working ecosystem for this [technology] to be meaningful," van Houten said.

Though not willing to say that Europe has a head start over the U.S. in NFC deployment, van Houten noted that Europe has a "strong track record of electronic payments" and said he believes Europe will be moving fast to adopt NFC.

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