

FocalPoint 40 Profile: Ambient Devices

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Ambient Devices Summary

Based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Ambient Devices is an innovator of information delivery, from devices to people, through patented and unique processes of decoding and displaying data.

Ambient Devices Offerings

Ambient Devices manages a wireless infrastructure to power embedded wireless display devices. Currently being marketed to consumers through Ambient and partner-branded products, Ambient's devices are dedicated displays of Internet-based information. Ambient's products are supported by their operating system for information delivery; this platform aggregates, scrubs, packetizes, transmits, and decodes data. In the company's own words, the platform serves to "make the world calmer," or organize data seamlessly in the midst of an information overload environment. The technology is designed to deliver "ambient" information that should be glanceable, or delivered on a constant basis through an environmental delivery method, such as light, color, or sound. The platform takes advantage of existing long-range networks, as well as emerging short-range connectivity standards.

Ambient Devices Differentiation

Ambient's main differentiation is a compression scheme (Ambient Markup Language - AML) that allows for a cost effective method of continual bit-trickling of data over existing wireless networks. As a result, customers are able to take advantage of embedded wireless computing in an innovative way. The technology provides an efficient way for a doctor or a family member to monitor a patient's health condition, and a seamless method for a financial services company to remain in constant contact with customers. In short, perpetual information availability will increase effectiveness of business, office, health care, and other services by allowing users to remain in touch with little effort. Ambient's partnerships with wireless data carriers, information managers, and manufacturers of embedded devices, such as Motorola, WebLink Wireless, USA Today, Orange, and CustomWeather, enable the company to leverage its position as an aggregator of data.

Brookstone Orb

Case Study

Ambient Devices has created a unique data platform. But today, Ambient's flagship product is a crystal ball it calls the Orb. Housing LEDs that change color to communicate the status of an index such as the



NASDAQ, the Orb is a grapefruit-sized globe of frosted glass,

designed to be a desk accoutrement. The relative success of the Orb has been very promising for Ambient and has, as a result, taken the company in a decidedly consumer-focused direction. The Orb's biggest in-roads into the consumer market has been through a branding agreement with Brookstone. As the Orb can be programmed to communicate almost any set of information (from stock portfolios to pollen count, from sports scores to weekend weather), Ambient hopes to create a number of event-specific products to fill out the Orb family of devices. At this point, it has two more devices in the pipeline (see below). Someday, simple color-coded displays of information will find applications in other markets including healthcare (patient status), industrial (event notification), utility (grid utilization), and others. Much of this adoption relies on the concept that people are looking for clear, reliable, low-bandwidth ways to monitor asset diagnostics at a glance.

Ambient Devices Markets

Ambient has been developing consumer applications to connect people in various information-heavy markets with their data through an ambient delivery method. Targeted markets include health and wellness, financial services, teens and toys, office environments, and business accessories. Currently, Ambient is making notable headway in the financial services market with its Orb product (see Case Study), capable of reporting on the state of the market or stock portfolio. The Orb has hit shelves nationally at Brookstone. Ambient also has two other consumer products planned; one will report on the weather and the other will deliver traffic conditions - every commuter's solution to the guess work of when to leave the office.

FocalPoint Perspective

Ambient Devices, to date, has made great strides as a consumer product company. The recent success of its Ambient Orb, including a partnership with Brookstone to sell Brookstone-branded Orbs in stores nationwide, has kept Ambient busy and in the press. But Ambient is a member of the FocalPoint 40 for another reason; its innovative platform for delivering information to a device in a seamless and communications agnostic way. Devices like the Orb also pave the way for a future where we will interact with elegantly simple devices dedicated to a very specific task, rather than the aggregated super devices few have been able to justify or pull off. Ambient's innovative platform coupled with its compelling credo of streamlined information access shows promise as people recognize the benefits of greater access to the myriad data points that their life relies upon.