



@ NAB: PBS to test Mobile DTV for emergency alerts

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LAS VEGAS—PBS said it will begin testing next-generation emergency alerts with a pilot project to use mobile digital TV to deliver multimedia alerts using video, audio, text and graphics to cellphones, tablets, laptops and in-car navigation systems.

The announcement, which came during a session on using mobile TV for emergency alert services, will use the ATSC Mobile Digital TV broadcast standard. Key partners in the test include LG Electronics Inc. and its U.S. research subsidiary Zenith, which will provide devices for the pilot program.

“As a leader in digital-only broadcasting, PBS has been involved in testing digital broadcasting as a part of an upgraded emergency system since 2005,” said PBS CTO John McCoskey in a prepared statement. “Now that the transition to digital is complete and Mobile DTV is rolling out, PBS will harness Mobile DTV’s powerful distribution system to provide new means of alerting Americans in the event of an emergency.”

McCoskey was part of a panel that touted the reliability of delivering emergency alerts using broadcast channels to cellphones. “Visual information is more powerful to understand the total information of the earthquake,” said one Japanese panelist, who explained how he used his mobile TV to get information on the quake and tsunami when the disaster hit. Cellphones didn’t work and lines to use pay telephone booths were at least a half-hour long.

Another panelist, Claude Seyrat, VP at Expway, which sells mobile DTV services to NTT DoCoMo in Japan, said the service showed how consumers need information before, during and after emergencies. In a somewhat humorous account, Seyrat explained his earthquake experience. “Everybody’s eyes start to worry,” he said, explaining he was in a meeting with his Japanese customers. His Japanese customer said: “ ‘Let’s go under the table all together.’ That’s strange, but I have to follow my customer.” The earthquake was Seyrat’s first and he was scared, but they quickly realized they were not part of the most devastated area. After awhile, mobile phones weren’t working so executives plugged a tablet into a projector to watch the news on the mobile broadcast channel. “It was horrific.”

Seyrat maintained that mobile broadcast TV is needed because Internet and TV access are often stationary and limited to the home, while FM radio tells the story only in audio. Mobile phone services does not scale to the mass market, he said. Along with mobile broadcast TV, Japan is working to add multimedia files, including maps, images and blueprints, to its mobile DTV service in the first quarter of 2012.

In the United States, wireless operators are largely planning to use cell broadcast technology to deliver emergency alerts, although the Federal Communications Commission has not dictated that operators use a specific standard. Operators that do not offer emergency alert technology will have to warn their

customers that they are not offering the service.

Battery life will need to be addressed in any emergency alert technology with mobile devices, said Kerry Oslund, VP of digital media at Schurz Communications Inc. “Japan is a clarion call to (the FCC) to minimally do the analysis of what happened in Japan and weave it back into the debate in the United States.”



Although Japan's second earthquake caused some speakers to have to miss this panel, the NAB audience still got to hear some first-hand accounts, like this one from a Japanese university professor.

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