Q&A

Analyst Q&A

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What do you expect to be the hot topics at this year's show?

Internet of things. The theme of this year's show is "The edge of innovation" so I'd expect to see even more connected devices and demos showing how they fit into a connected lifestyle. We've been hearing a lot about IoT, wearables, and connected things and I'm looking forward to seeing some cool connected stuff.

This will be the year that 5G takes over MWC. While vendors jockey for mindshare, there will be no shortage of posturing around "what 5G is" and who should care. This includes the technologies that will make 5G a reality (including virtualisation, millimetre wave spectrum, unlicensed spectrum, duplex-free operations) along with 5G drivers like ubiquitous IoT demands.

Wearables are part of most manufacturers' roadmaps for this year and we will see an explosion of new products at MWC. Apple Watch will help to grow consumers' awareness of the category, while low-end LTE phablets will also be at the centre of each phone maker's launches as larger screens become mainstream at affordable prices.

IoT in the form of wearables, the smart home and connected car will be the big themes once again. Wearables, smartphones and tablets will be launched in fleets like last year. For smartphones I'm expecting to see dual-edge displays, gesture sensors, arrays of multiple camera sensors or camera fusion, energy harvesting, and LTE at ridiculously low prices.

Flagship smartphone launches – some vendors have used their own events for their flagship smartphone launches: this year they are doing it on the biggest stage. Connected devices – the products and the lack of a common standard that will get them talking to each other. The topic of security will not go away. It is getting more complex to protect our data – a great industry to be in.

Any tips for a breakthrough name, service or application?

Uber has recently caused quite a lot of disruption in its field and I am expecting to see start-ups in other industries utilising a similar business model. We're also seeing the messaging space moving towards ephemeral and anonymous messaging with apps such as Yik Yak and Tappy, which allow users to share messages and pictures with anyone in the same location as them.

Virtualisation and SDN will be much more "real." In 2013, the topics seemed to dominate MWC – with SDN often getting conflated with NFV. Last year, messaging honed in on NFV as carrier demands became clearer and vendor solutions emerged. This year, carrier trials, deployments and Proof of Concepts set the stage for moving the topics from white boards and into reality.

FlexEnable has developed an organic transistor technology that that can be used to create truly flexible electronics with plastic flexible circuits. The company claims that this enables ultra-thin, ultra-lightweight, shatterproof electronic displays. This breakthrough technology, with cost-effective manufacturing, will revolutionise mobile devices and wearables and will open up new worlds for the Internet of things (IoT).

Voice and gesture based user interfaces will also be hot topics especially for wearables, smart homes and the connected car. Also, renewed interest in alternate operating systems like Windows Phone, Firefox and even AOSP given Android OEM profits, due to lack of differentiation.

It's been talked about for a number of years but we could see the breakthrough of soft SIMs this year. It won't be popular with the mobile operators, but a couple of influential, global device vendors moving in that direction could be enough to accelerate the move.

What will be the most overhyped sector in mobile this year?

5G will be a big focus area, however it is premature to talk about potential applications as there is still no consensus on what it is. Also, many of the 5G use cases that have been proposed could actually be achieved with 4G technologies, with more operators enhancing their networks with NFV/SDN or HetNets.

5G – no doubt. Absent any clear definitions on what 5G really is (or will be), expect to see the term applied to nearly every mobile technology under the sun. The positioning of 5G as an evolution from today's 4G networks supports this type of marketing. That doesn't mean it won't quickly become annoying to hear everything linked to 5G, years before initial deployments take place.

Virtual reality. Since the acquisition of the virtual reality startup Oculus VR by Facebook, we have seen new products being announced, such as Samsung's Gear VR or the Sony Morpheus VR. But the lack of content, the bulky hardware, the premium price tag and the potentially limited number of users interested in it may result in a gimmick technology like 3D TVs or 3D smartphones.

Big data is an over-used and clichéd term. The potential is enormous, but it is a huge area that needs to be broken down into its constituent manageable parts to ensure progress.

Smart clothing. Beyond professional athletes, there are not enough compelling use cases today. I'm hoping that with advancement of sensor technology, the wearable band on my wrist is able to gather all the relevant data about me that I (or my doctor) need.

What one thing would you like to happen in the mobile industry in the next 12 months?

More activity within the cellular IoT space. Operators and vendors need to collaborate more to enable the growth of low power wide area applications within utilities, smart cities and agriculture. I'd like to see also more focus on developing innovative and sustainable business models in this area.

If we can look back at 2015 and see a deeper vendor focus on mobile services and experiences – not just networks and devices – that would make me very happy. Yes, networks and devices are key to delivering meaningful experiences. But they're only one part of the equation...and not necessarily the part that will help every carrier differentiate or break out of price wars.

I would like to see the mobile wallet become a mass market reality. Most people carry several payment cards, loyalty cards, tickets, receipts, vouchers, and cash. The wide availability of smartphones with NFC technology can enable the mobile wallet in everyone's pockets, when the hurdles are overcome. Despite the challenges, the launch of Apple Pay last year will trigger the industry to move faster toward a solution.

Operator tariff innovation for tablets and wearables. For example, AT&T and Qualcomm may have forged a way ahead with the Timex Ironman Watch; 1 year free followed by US$40 per year thereafter, enabled by using a Qualcomm server to work as an intermediary between the network and watch, shrinking messaging and minimising power consumption. Similarly more eSIMs in an effort to increase the WAN attach rate for wearables, tablets, cars and beyond.

It's happening but I'd like to see the Indian ICT market really fulfil its potential. The growth in China has been phenomenal in recent years – according to Canalys over 90% of new phones sold in China are smartphones, it is less than 40% in India. But it is not just about getting smartphones in the hands of consumers. Indian device vendors source components from China, India needs its own tech manufacturing ecosystem.