Facebook sets limit for number of friends at 5000.

Verizon confirms Droid X screen glitch and fix.

Google faces Brazil probe over paedophilia, defamation and false identity on its social networking site Orkut.

Technomics

ConsumerScope

A tale of two innovations

DEEPAK KUMAR

If innovating is doing things differently, then two noticeable ICT innovations were in news recently. A Bengaluru-based start-up launched a Mozilla-powered browser with native transliteration support for several Indian languages, and a few foreign languages, while a Noida-based company came out with mobile phones that use a full-alpha keypad instead of a QWERTY one. I've been using and testing the browser 'Epic' since Sunday afternoon and have been more than impressed with the richness of its features, of which I find the native word processor as the most noteworthy. It can be invoked within the browser at one click and in, fact, neatly illustrates how future browsers could be obviating the need for various standalone desktop applications. Using built-in transliteration, the word processor can be used to produce text in multiple languages, which would empower a large number of Internet users who are literate but not very proficient in English. In fact, I tried multiple languages within the same document and it worked. This would enrich day-to-day informal communication such as doing a post on a social networking site wherein one could intersperse a Kannada, Telgu or Urdu word that conveys a thought better than an English word sometimes would. The side-bar in the browser prompts a user to open a Facebook or a Twitter side pane, quite intuitively. Talking of the side pane, it can actually be used to open a wide range of applications, ranging from travel to job search to YouTube to live TV. I particularly liked the live TV feature, as it engages one non-intrusively while one carries on with a browsing session. The other innovation has come from Noida-based mobile phone maker Lava International, one of the more than 30 Indian handset makers that have come up within the last couple of years. Sometimes dubbed as 'copycats,' these brands sport models that mimic

the look and feel — and many features — of the better known international brands. These local brands are fairly recognized in the lower and mid-market segments, across the country. A large number of these users have not used a PC and therefore have no prior exposure to a QWERTY layout and so texting is a rather cumbersome process for them. Texting with a half-alpha keypad, where three letters are accommodated on each key, is also an irritant, even for the initiated user. Lava has made a good attempt at overcoming the limitation, by blending the strengths of the full-qwerty and half-alpha layouts. The result is that letters are arranged in an alphabetical order, with one key assigned per alphabet. The total number of letters in one row remains the same as in QWERTY layout — 10 letters in first row, nine in the second and seven in the third one. A full-alpha keypad can simplify texting for non-qwerty users and bring more users to the SMS fold. Both the products show innovative thinking at work, while taking a consumer-centric view of an offering. In Epic, Bangalore is also seeing the second major product being developed in a span of around seven months. The earlier one, the Adam tablet PC, was announced by another city-based start-up Notion Ink in December 2009, ahead of the Consumer Electronics Show 2010 in January 2010.

Both the products have sound potential to be globally successful. (Adding native support for more global languages and scripts will easily expand the browser's appeal to users in other countries.) The positives stated are not to say that Epic won't have its share of shortcomings, but hopefully the developer Hidden Reflex would be working to better it. Incidentally, this is the first year of India's 'Decade of Innovation,' a program aimed at producing effective solutions in areas of healthcare, energy, urban infrastructure, water and transportation.

These solutions would lead to empowerment of masses and hence are potentially of great value to the nation. Epic-like innovations that can empower the bottom-of-the-pyramid consumers will be no less valuable.

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Innovation is alive and well

SANGEETHA CHENGAPPA
DC | BENGALURU

July 21: Even as governments of developed nations champion the cause of innovation as the only way to develop breakthrough technologies and dynamic companies that will create jobs, global technology majors are doing their bit to create the right environment to foster innovations that will create practical, affordable solutions for emerging markets. For instance, Intel launched a national level competition – Intel India Embedded Challenge – in August 2009 with an obective to create a platform for engineering, MBA students and technical professionals to explore the endless possibilities of embedded applications based on Embedded Intel Architecture.

In the first phase of the contest, Intel received 2,170 innovative ideas from participants in applications areas such as, medical devices, consumer electronics, green computing, robotics, gaming etc, which was evaluated and selected by a team of experts from Intel. In the second phase, 455 shortlisted teams submitted extracts based on embedded technology which was evaluated and shortlisted to 36 teams who in turn developed prototypes of their innovative ideas with Intel Atom kits provided by the company. Student teams were assigned to an Intel Technologist as a technology mentor to improvise and prototype their innovations. Winners stand a chance to participate in India Innovation Pioneers Challenge conducted by Intel, Department of Science & Technology and Indo-US Science and Technology Forum.

Here are samples of some

Sanjay Bansal (centre), demonstrates the working of the Tractrobot with its user-friendly colour coded, graphical user interface that farmers can relate to instantly and operate in five simple steps.
— R. Samuel

of the innovative applications that were showcased in the city today, starting with the winning entry:

TRACTROBOT: Winning the grand prize of Rs 10 lakh, the tractrobot is a remote controlled autonomous tractor that can substitute human controlled agricultural operations. Developed by Sanjay Bansal, who runs an IT company and his team, the system has a remote console unit that measures the land area that has to be tilled, draws up a tilling zone and pathway and is steered with a joystick with video monitoring system using Wi-Fi from any location. The tractrobot uses technologies like GPS, GIS, remote video monitoring, artificial intelligence etc and provides a colour coded based simple GUI that farmers can relate

to easily in order to steer and control the tractor's operations. The automation kit developed by Bansal costs Rs 70,000 which can be integrated with tractors providing Indian farmers with a cost-effective solution to cut down on manpower to farm their land.

GESTURE-BASED WHEELCHAIR: Developed by a team of students from Amrita School of Engineering, Kollam, Kerala, the proposed system uses a small camera mounted very close to the physically challenged person's hand-rest on the wheelchair, which tracks the small movements of their fingers to understand where they wish to travel. The recognition system is then interfaced to the wheelchair control system in order to move it to the desired location.

Controlling and navigating existing wheelchairs is usually through joysticks or buttons. However quadriplegics who lack fine motor control would find it near impossible to use this.

COUCH POTATO: For all you lazy heads out there, the Couch Potato is an intelligent media player that not only plays movies, music, photos in any format but also brings with it the convenience of remotely controlling lights, fans, gas stove, A/C etc in any part of the house, through the user's bluetooth enabled mobile phone and even programme these devices to switch on and off.

The various home appliances, and devices can also be programmed to switch on and off any time. Designed to bridge the gap between
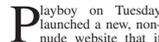
the entry level media players and high end home automation systems, the Couch Potato was developed by Sudhir Baliga and his team. Sudhir works with BOSCHE Automate, Bangalore.

GREEN VEHICLES: A team from Sona College of Technology, Salem, have come up with a concept of incorporating chemical chambers to the exhaust system of vehicles. The chamber will contain chemical crystals which trap the carbon particles and cut emissions by 60-70 per cent. This chamber also relays information as to the condition of the vehicle and monitors its performance without having an adverse effect.

Although the concept of having green vehicles interests everybody no one really bothers to do anything about it. Well, now, even your regular vehicles can be transformed to a green one with minimum levels of cost incurred.

WIRELESS SENSOR NETWORK: Safety while travelling by train is an area of great concern, especially in times when train accidents are occuring with alarming frequency.

A team from Heritage Institute of Technology, Kolkata have developed this pronet which monitors the rail lines before the trains take to it.

It is done through censors fitted to robotic arms that detect any malicious objects in the rail lines while running along it, analyze it and relay information back to the control centres. GPS helps to locate any malicious objects such as 'IED' (improvised explosive devices) instantaneously.

New devices drive Apple's profit by 78%

MIGUEL HELFT
NEW YORK

July 21: The iPhone 4 antenna may be causing static for some Apple investors, but the company is showing no signs of slowing down.

Apple said on Tuesday that its net income rose 78 percent last quarter, driven by strong sales of the iPhone, the iPad and the Macintosh line of computers.

The results show that Apple is continuing to outpace its competitors in its three major lines of business: computers, phones and tablets. And Apple would be selling even more iPhones and iPads if it could keep up with demand.

"More and more, people's lives are dependent on desktop and mobile computing," said Gene Munster, an analyst with Piper Jaffray. "People realize that and are willing to pay up for it, and Apple is capitalizing on

A new Apple store in Shanghai. The company said it would be selling even more iPhones and iPads if it could increase production.

that."

Apple executives said they were pleased with the results, which topped Wall Street's forecasts.

"iPad is off to a terrific start, more people are buying Macs than ever before, and we have amazing new products still to come this year," Steven P. Jobs, Apple's chief executive, said

in a news release.

Apple sold nearly 3.3 million iPads in the quarter. Consumers gravitated to higher-priced models of the tablet, helping to create a new segment of Apple's business that generated revenue of $2.1 billion.

With 8.4 million units sold, the iPhone remains Apple's biggest and most

profitable business, generating $5.3 billion in revenue in the quarter. Most of the sales were of the iPhone 3G and 3GS, since the iPhone 4 went on sale June 24, just three days before the quarter's end.

And Apple sold 3.47 million Macintosh computers, the most ever in a quarter, dispelling fears that the iPad would hurt those sales.

"Apple was scared that the iPad would cannibalize sales of Macintosh computers," Mr. Munster said. "That's not happening."

Apple said its net income rose to $3.25 billion, or $3.51 a share, a 78 percent jump from a year earlier. Revenue rose 61 percent, to $15.7 billion.

On average, Wall Street analysts had expected Apple to report net income of $3.12 a share on revenue of $14.75 billion.

Investors were watching for the effect of the iPad on Apple's profit margins; the company had warned earlier

that the iPad's margins would be lower than those of products like the iPhone. But in a conference call with investors, Apple executives said that the drop was less than expected, in part because of brisk sales of highly profitable iPhones.

Over all, Apple's gross margin was 39.1 in the most recent quarter, down from 40.9 percent in the period a year earlier. The company also gave a bullish forecast for the current quarter.

"Apple is now a multifaceted company, and it continues to defy the economy," said Shaw Wu, an analyst with Kaufman Brothers.

Shares of Apple had fallen nearly 9 percent since the introduction of the iPhone 4, but they rebounded 2.57 percent on Tuesday to close at $251.89. Apple released its financial results after the close of regular trading, and its shares rose an additional 3.1 percent in after-hours trading.

— NYT

Hi, I am AJ, on Twitter no one knows i am a car

JOHN R. QUAIN
NEW YORK

July 21: On Twitter, no one knows you're a car.

The social networking, micro-blogging trend is already a mainstay of the tech-savvy generation, but why would anyone want a car to send Twitter messages? And how is that possible?

The car that could Twitter is AJ, a 2011 Ford Fiesta that's a test bed for company engineers exploring the boundaries of what's possible when an automobile is connected to the Internet and all of its concomitant services. In May, a team of Ford engineers drove AJ from Ann Arbor, Michigan, to San Mateo, California, to participate in the Maker Faire. Along the way, AJ sent out Twitter messages.

"It's getting pretty dark;

time to put the headlights on," was a typical entry, but followers also learned when AJ's mood was "joyful." But how could a car be joyful?

"There's no traffic, and it's not raining and it's enjoying a winding road," said Joe Rork, an information technology architect with Ford's in-vehicle research and strategy team. Mr. Rork recalled the journey recently during a presentation in Manhattan. He explained that AJ was indeed sending the messages on its own.

The software behind AJ was an app called the "Auto"matic Blog. It tapped into the available data on the car, including telemetry information, like location, speed, acceleration and braking.

It also gleaned information from the windshield wipers, steering input and GPS data and correlated it with live

AJ, the Ford Fiesta that sends Twitter messages.

information culled from the Web.

So AJ's software could combine, say, real-time traffic notices about congestion

with its current situation (stop-and-go braking) and weather forecasts (storms ahead) and then send a Twitter entry like, "Stuck in traf-

fic; not looking forward to next 50 miles, either."

The Twitter app wasn't the only connected software the Ford engineers tested. The

group also ran the location-based Foursquare app, through which the car could automatically check the team in at restaurants and tourist spots along the way (and send pictures).

Also being tested was a program developed by University of Michigan students called Caravan Track, which allows a group of fellow travelers to be automatically apprised of their friends' locations and conditions up ahead.

But why would anyone want to do this? Ford is already on track to add smartphone apps, including a Twitter feed, to its Sync-based cars later this year.

It has also announced that it will enable other phone apps to connect to its cars, essentially allowing third-party software programs to use a vehicle's built-incon-

trols, like buttons on the steering wheel, to control programs, including music players running on connected Android phones.

The tests with AJ were a natural extension of this strategy, according to Mr. Rork, to see what's possible when the car is connected and online all the time. Interestingly, mainly off-the-shelf hardware was used, including a high-speed cellular data connection, a Wi-Fi router and a Dell computer running Windows 7 in the trunk. It means just about any car could be turned into a Twittermobile.

And as for those who scoff at the idea that anyone would want to receive messages from a car, consider that even though AJ rarely sends message these days, he still has more Twitter followers than I do.

— NYT

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bITs

Playboy's new site safe@work

Playboy on Tuesday launched a new, non-nude website that it described as being safe-for-work and a "satirical antidote to the drudgery of the work day. "Produced specifically for the Internet, www.TheSmokingJacket.com contains posts and viral content in categories such as Girls, Entertainment, Sex, Videos and Lifestyle. It also provides links to other videos around the web as well photos from the Playboy archives. "The smoking jacket isn't just something I like to wear around the mansion," Playboy's iconic founder Hugh Hefner, 84, says in a video posted on the site. "It's Playboy's safe for work website. Next to the mansion, it's the best hangout on the planet." Playboy's traditional magazine business has been hard hit by declining circulation and advertising revenue as people turn to free pornography on the Internet. On Tuesday, the new site had posts such as "How to Get Laid at Work," and "How to Hang Out with Porn Chicks". The Playboy.com web site, which contains nudity and longer lifestyle articles, has 6 million unique monthly visitors to its site, Playboy said.
— NYT

Lenovo plans Android tablet PC

Lenovo Group, the world's No.4 PC brand, said it will roll out its own tablet PC, becoming the latest technology company to jump on the bandwagon for computers styled after Apple Inc's popular iPad. Lenovo was developing a tablet PC, known internally as LePad, that would run on Google Inc's Android operating system, Lenovo spokeswoman Wu Hwa said on Wednesday, adding that no launch date had been set and the name of the product may change. "We want the tablet PC to be compatible with our LePhone smartphone, which is why we're using Android," Wu said. LePhone is Lenovo's smartphone offering in China, sold by China Unicom, which also runs on Android.
— Reuters

Yahoo misses revenue forecast

Yahoo said Tuesday that its profit increased more than 50 percent in the second quarter but that its net revenue fell short of Wall Street expectations. Yahoo's shares were down more than 6 percent in after-hours trading. Revenue in the three months ending June 30 totaled $1.6 billion, compared with $1.57 billion in the period a year ago. But net revenue, which excludes revenue it shares with Web site partners, was $1.13 billion — below the average analyst expectation of $1.16 billion, according to Thomson Reuters. Shares of Yahoo were down 6 percent later on Tuesday.
— Reuters