
WCA, What's Hot and What's Not in Mobility

Contributed by Maciej Bajkowski
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There are so many interesting conferences, symposia, and panel discussions that it is pity that one cannot attend them all. As such, it is always nice when someone who does attend an interesting event, takes the time to post of few highlight. Even better when a nice succinct trip report with some observations and commentary is provided. This time, the thanks go out to Mike Demler, and his *The World is Analog* blog for providing excellent coverage from the 10th Annual Wireless Communications Alliance (WCA) What's Hot and What's Not in Mobility 2009 investor panel discussion that occurred last week in Santa Clara, CA. Part 1 of the report can be found here, and part two can be found here. The panel consisted of Eric Zimits (Managing Director, Granite Ventures), Dev Khare (Vice President, Venrock), Tim Chang (Principal, Northwest Venture Partners, and Scott Raney (Partner, Redpoint Ventures), and was moderated by Scott Ellison (VP Mobility Wireless, IDC). I encourage you to take some time and read both parts as they contain some interesting highlights and observations on a variety of subjects including: venture capital, mobile - software, services, infrastructure, TV, health, commerce, and advertising - just to mention a few. If you are only interested in semiconductor startup related comments, here are the key takeaways: Startup capital for fabless digital design startups is almost non-existent. And while that Panelists placed the blame on China's plethora of fabless design startups, I'm more in agreement with Mike's observation that it is the cost of developing chips on the leading edge process that has erased the value proposition for potential investors. The Panelists were in agreement on the fact that RF and analog areas where a much better opportunity for semiconductor startups mostly due the smaller team sizes that are needed. The number of RF and mixed-signal startups that we have covered on this blog over the last few months very much supports this notion. As a matter of fact, I would say that any startup that can take what is usually considered an analog design problem and can find a digital implementation for it stands a good chance of finding some funding especially in the wireless space. On a related note, Femtocells are also becoming increasingly of interest mostly due to the bandwidth overloading that is currently experienced by the majority of the wireless carriers. We covered a startup called Percello last year that specializes in baseband processors for the Femtocell market. Finally, on the mobile processor side of things, the panelists held a strong believe that ARM will eat Intel's lunch over the next few years and displace Intel's Atom processor in the netbook/smartbook and smartphone markets. Once again I have to agree with Mike that one should never underestimate Intel, even if they are a relative newcomer to the SoC space (disclosure: I do have an affiliation with Intel; however, the opinions on this blog are purely and completely mine, and are not reflective of Intel's opinions and business strategy).