Will Android Rise to the FaceTime Challenge?

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When Apple launched iPhone 4 in June 2010, it placed a new challenge in front of the Android pack: providing video calling services.

While Apple is capable of providing its own closed-garden end-to-end video calling service, called **FaceTime**, and make it run on mobile handsets, laptops and (in the future) tablets… doing the same on Android isn't that easy.

Photo: Tsahi Levent-Levi

There are technical challenges of adding real-time video telephony on Android. But there are business challenges, as well-- challenges bound to put strains on the Android ecosystem.

Video calling as a service is closer to what cellular service providers offer their customers. This brings us to the question: assuming that video calling is a mandatory feature for smartphones, what type of ecosystem and business solution does it require? Here are some options:

1. Using downloadable applications to try and bridge the gap. This strategy can be adopted by handset vendors and service providers alike. It comes at a price of eroding the brand name of the handset vendor and the service provider.
2. A handset vendor branded solution, in the spirit of Apple's FaceTime, where a handset

vendor sets out to become his own service provider. In this case, connectivity to devices by other vendors is crucial to bring the critical mass required for such a service.

3. Google's homegrown Gtalk service, which is planned for the Android 3.0 Honeycomb release, does video calling. It works in Google's infrastructure, where Google is the service provider. Operators can decide to either adopt it or ditch it.

4. An operator's own branded solutions, similar to what Verizon Wireless has showcased with LG at MWC 2010. In this case, handset vendors need to adopt the VoLTE specification and implement it on their handsets while operators deploy the service.

2011 will shape the ecosystem of mobile video calling, but the end result will need to be interoperable for video calling to become ubiquitous. To this end, RADVISION has developed its BEEHD for Personal Devices client framework, which is capable of integrating into any Android device and connect to any standards-based network.

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