For wireless power market success, look to the east

According to an upcoming report from IMS Research, Japan is forecast to become the leading market for wireless power technology this year, with enabled devices surpassing two million shipments by year's end. The report points to mobile phone carrier support, in-box packaging, and deployment of wireless power infrastructure as the main reasons for the rapid rise in cable-free charging.

Wireless power technology, which allows consumer devices like cell phones to be charged by placing them on a special mat or surface, has been commercially available for several years, but has struggled to find its way into the mainstream. In the United States, users much purchase an additional sleeve or battery door along with a charging pad. This can be a tall order just to gain some convenience by eliminating the need for a power cord. However, developments in Japan suggest that increased sales could be close.

Jason dePreaux, an analyst with IMS Research comments: "Japan is doing all the right things with regard to wireless charging. Its largest carrier, NTT Docomo, has devoted significant resource to deploying wireless power. In conjunction with its OEM partners, Docomo is releasing several smartphone models that are enabled for wireless power. More important, these are in-box solutions that combine the phone along with the wireless power receiver and transmitter all in one package. Having all the necessary pieces to start with reduces the complexity of wireless power considerably."

dePreaux says that there are several unique reasons why Japan is an environment ripe for wireless charging. "For one, Docomo has a massive presence, with 48 percent of subscribers in Japan and wields considerable influence in the features found on its phones. Another reason is that wireless power is becoming more visible to consumers in Japan, not just at retail locations, but in infrastructure as well. With charge points at airports, restaurants, and cafes, the benefit of wireless power becomes more compelling. Finally, Japanese consumers are often early adaptors of such high-tech features."

Japan is not the only country in Asia where wireless power has potential. In Korea, OEMs, technology providers and telecom carriers are showing much activity in wireless power. Mobile phone giants Samsung and LG, based in Korea, seem to be taking different approaches. LG, like NTT Docomo, offers phones which are "Qi" compatible; meaning they are based on specifications from the Wireless Power Consortium. However, Samsung recently teamed up with Qualcomm to promote a rival effort to standardize wireless power, the Alliance for Wireless Power.

Can Japan's success be replicated in the United States? dePreaux cautions that it will be difficult. "There is mixed support for wireless power on the part of carriers in

the US and little in the way of marketing to date to stimulate demand for this as a 'must have' feature. But it is still very early on in the game. It took nearly a decade for Bluetooth to get into a majority of phones."

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