

Rich Communication Suites: a significant convergence initiative

1 RCS: not just standard or a set of services

It is almost easier to say what RCS is not than to say what it is: It commonly referred to an 'initiative' or 'industry effort' rather than a formal or technical standard. The GSMA's RCS initiative declared that RCS itself is neither a set of applications nor a set of services, but rather an enabling framework for services. Furthermore, although the RCS framework is managed rather like a standard, it is based on existing standards and specifications, for example, in the case of presence, it uses the framework of OMA Presence SIMPLE 1.1.

RCS is closely bound up with the IMS architecture, which is sometimes offered as a partial answer to 'what is IMS good for?' In ZTE's opinion, particularly for our IMS, the RCS is intended to be a set of defined IMS-based services which mobile operators implement in a common way, thus making it easier for inter-operability between them and between different vendors' technology components.

2 RCS for end-user: direct benefits

RCS is important because it represents an attempt to bring features and functionality offered in the IP world into mobile telecoms services. As such, it turns out to be a more significant aspect of end-user experience enhancing than all the access-oriented convergence initiatives.

From the end-users' perspective, RCS Release 1.0 enables three services as follows:

- Enhanced phonebook: It enables users to see the presence state of people in their normal mobile contacts list and available communications methods to contact them.
- Enhanced messaging: It adds IM functionality and conversational models to existing mobile messaging capability
- Enriched call: It allows sharing of multimedia content during a call, including sharing of video files and real-sightseeing.

Release 2, already under discussion though not yet completed, will add a PC client to allow PC-to-mobile and perhaps also PC-to-PC communications. Whether this will require a SIM card to be physically attached to the PC, as in the model used by some existing services such as Unik and Outsmart's Plug'n'Talk product, is yet to be decided.

3 RCS: emphasis operators' key assets

The most concern of operators to RCS is the efforts to encourage the take-up of mobile data services through attractive tariffs could have side-effect on mobile voice revenues, but in fact at present there does not seem to be that much to worry about. The current experiences of IP based voicing applications as Skype, Google Voice or Google talk represent that RCS can best be understood as something of a pre-emptive strike by the traditional mobile players against this potential future, which is definitely counted as a evaluation though mobile operators only hope that they can cash in at best, and at least hold back some at worst. ZTE suggests, as RCS stands for a new revenue model, why not think about to be benefited through mobile voice begins to transmute into an IP data application?

RCS services are addressed via the traditional telephone number, and by attaching more advanced services to the mobile number, it plays to the operators' strengths – the unique relationship that users continue to have with their mobile number and enables it to function across both traditional and IP services. In that sense, RCS is a more genuine convergence play than many of the fixed–mobile convergence (FMC) services which have hitherto been launched.

RCS correctly identifies the operators' key assets – the telephone number and the authentication infrastructure. Some commentators have suggested that the integration of voice services into other Internet applications such as social networks will be the real battleground, and that the enhanced telephony and messaging services offered by RCS are simply another – albeit slightly wider – silo.

4 ZTE RCS: prospects for success

4.1 ZTE RCS goes with communication behaviors

The current success of Internet telephony, IM and communications embedded within other applications shows that ZTE RCS is at least merging into the right

track. Indeed, nowadays more and more enterprise telephony or desktop software vendors come to show its face in public with the ZTE unified communication strategy.

Figure 1 ZTE RCS on ubiquitous network (Solution & Highlights)



ZTE RCS is targeted primarily at younger consumer users, who are both keen and able to handle multiple communications channels at the same time. In developed markets, further integration with PC clients is likely to be important to this segment. Simultaneous SMS and IM conversations are well established patterns of behavior here, and a well designed PC client for RCS should go a long way to help making ZTE RCS services 'sticky'.

4.2 More than RCS

ZTE anticipates RCS to be mass-market successful since for a while operators, as the three operators in France had started to work together to deploy interoperable services. ZTE is striving to put continuous efforts on developing RCS services based on the standard RCS releases announced by GSM Association, which are supported by more than 50 major telecom companies. Our services are currently at the stage of between releases of 1.0 and 2.0, and we had have roadmap as the clear perspective to the coming RCS 3.0. Besides standard services, ZTE provides more as the converged Centrex/converged One Number, Tele conferencing, etc: ZTE proudly says that we provide more than just RCS and we supports service customization.

4.3 Service application is everything

ZTE RCS is far from being only the 'skin'. Rather than those entertainment and game based RCS applications, there have already been some interesting ZTE RCS initiatives based on business purpose have been offered, within some similar features.

ZTE has been cooperating with many operators in RCS field. In fairness, we must point out that all of these are primarily business focused services, while RCS is aimed squarely at younger consumer users. On the other hand, ZTE is now taking its pre-RCS service beyond the initial teenage target market, and may be considering business-oriented propositions soon.