

RF Remote Control Nears Tipping Point, says Nordic CEO

Ultra low power (ULP) RF specialist Nordic Semiconductor ASA Chief Executive Officer, Svenn-Tore Larsen, says today that the adoption of RF remote control technology in place of traditional IR is approaching a tipping point because RF now offers the performance and features demanded by consumers at pricing levels acceptable to the mass market.

"While nobody's claiming that an RF remote control is ever going to be lower cost than an IR unit any time soon," explains Larsen, "one-button-one-operation, line-of-sight-access-only IR will simply become so frustrating that end users will be happy to pay the small premium necessary to access the enhanced navigation and control features supported by two-way (bi-directional) RF technology." This includes the use of touchpads, scroll wheels, touchscreens, and LCD displays that can display, for example, 'live' playing status info and album artwork, as well as non-directional - often through-wall - operation.

"These ease-of-use advantages are driving RF remote control technology into the mainstream by raising consumer awareness of what's possible and making IR remote controls look increasingly dated and unappealing in comparison," continues Larsen. "In addition, the price of RF remote controls continues to fall and is approaching a point whereby RF controllers are becoming attractive to consumer electronics manufacturers for routine bundling with their products."

Several research studies have also independently arrived at the same conclusion. Strategy Analytics, for instance, says that early adopters of advanced Internet TV services (such as Apple TV, Hulu, PlayStation Network video, Netflix on Xbox Live, and AT&T U-Verse) are demanding improved controllers (see tinyurl.com/y4tgxk9), and that when questioned consumers expressed a preference for simple, pointing 'wand' controllers for navigating their way around Internet-connected TVs (see tinyurl.com/2eccrke).

In addition, major consumer electronics (CE) giants such as Philips are now offering RF remote control platforms to OEM manufacturers of digital media devices such as music players, TVs, and PCs (e.g. the Philips Bellagio RF remote control platform from Philips Home Control - see tinyurl.com/2aec5dd), and a growing number of universal RF and IR remotes are being launched (e.g. the M-Remote from Audivo - see tinyurl.com/2dnrvne).

And the Apple iPhone, iPod touch and/or iPad are now being used by a number of innovative CE manufacturers as a remote control using (typically free) downloadable apps to provide the user interface (e.g. Meridian in its award-winning Sooloos digital media system - see tinyurl.com/39bm3to).

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"The RF remote control market will be served by a combination of proprietary and standards-based solutions dependent on the needs of the end application," concludes Larsen. "Nordic Semiconductor is well positioned to provide both types of remote control with its nRF24LE1/Gazell proprietary products and forthcoming Bluetooth low energy wireless technology solutions.

"Furthermore, the proven 2.4 GHz wireless connectivity technology Nordic pioneered for PC peripherals (e.g. wireless mice, keyboards and joysticks) is exactly the same technology required for next generation RF remote controls."

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