

OPERA INSIGHTS

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Partner spotlight

AirTies: The connected home landscape

Technology partners bring different aspects of the connected home concept to life. Strong partnerships are essential to making the concept work because each partner enables a different aspect of the “puzzle”. AirTies develops and markets wireless products for service providers, small businesses and consumers in the EMEA region, and, like Opera, is committed to connecting the home both to the outside world and devices within the home. AirTies envisions, also like Opera, a connected life. Their vision is: “We see a world where you can connect to anyone and anything electronic in your home or to your home seamlessly and securely, and control everything intuitively.”

Opera Insights talked with AirTies’ Multimedia Product Line Marketing Manager, Zvika Haas, about AirTies and how its products and technology fit into the connected home landscape as well as how connected home and life trends are moving in the marketplace.

Opera Insights (OI): Could you provide some brief background about AirTies’ history?



Zvika Haas (ZH): AirTies’ core technology in the beginning was wireless gateway technology. We have moved in the last two years into the multimedia set-top box (STB) business. Now we are providing a complete home network solution—gateways, STBs, accessories. We provide wireless video distribution at home, and we also provide a way to set up a wireless network without the hassle of selecting security protocol, SSID, modem, password, etc. We have AirTouch, which enables the setup of a wireless network with a touch of a button. You push a button on the gateway and press a key on the STB remote control, and automatically establish a secure wireless connection. This also works with laptop and gateway and other devices. It is an intuitive and simple way to setup a wireless network and ultimately why we conquered the Turkish market, although that was not originally the goal of the company. It was lucky for the company that we started out at the same time the Turkish market started growing, and year upon year, we expanded, reaching 70 percent market share in the Turkish market (4

million AirTies ADSL products in the market). The same thing is happening in Greece, Russia, Ukraine.

AirTies is a relatively new company, almost six years old. The founders of AirTies were two Turkish guys and a Dutch guy working in Silicon Valley who decided that something was wrong with the way people are getting home gateways. They decided to launch a company with R&D in Turkey to build different products with different

positioning and to offer support aimed at home users. This is a differentiator. If someone buys an AirTies product in Turkey, Russia, Greece, they get customer support directly from AirTies. If you buy a solution from a competitor, you can call customer service but they are only resellers and cannot help directly without an in-house R&D. With a direct connection to its end users, coupled with its own R&D, AirTies can.



The point of this is that AirTies believes in customer-driven innovation. We get a lot of calls from customers saying, “I wish I could do A, B, or C.” We take these suggestions seriously and evaluate and implement them as we see fit. This creates a better, more robust, stable product based on what customers really want and need, leading to customer satisfaction, the customer base and technology that enable the connected home.

Ultimately with our wireless network, wireless video and other innovations, we aim to make life easier for the end user.

“ Our vision is to have a wireless home—everything will be wireless. ”

OI: Can you talk a bit about how AirTies and Opera Software started to work together?

ZH: I came from a middleware company where I was in charge of client technology, such as aspects of UI, applications and services on top of STBs, including the browser. Moving to an STB company with this experience gave me a different perspective on the way we should focus on the UI, which is very different from how other STB companies see it. One of the reasons I wanted Opera for AirTies was because of my prior experience with Opera on other STBs and strong business relationships developed within Opera. The major driver in choosing Opera is that Opera offers what I think is one of the best UI platforms possible for set-top boxes.

OI: How do you see AirTies fitting into the connected home/connected life theme right now?

ZH: Our vision is to have a wireless home—everything will be wireless. We have already established some proof of concept in that domain, and we are moving on with other products. We definitely see, for example, a wireless STB getting transmission of IPTV

services. Even some cable STBs, or some kind of modem at home that sends video to other STBs. Network DVD. Wireless photo frames, PVRs—these complete our vision of the wireless home.

Today our gateways already provide a connection to, for example, an external hard drive to get all the content from it to the TV— a PC is not needed to access the content. The STB can have direct access to all the hard-drive content and play it on the TV.

With IPTV service, there is usually a virtual network and you cannot access the PC from an STB because of security and quality of service, both coming from separate virtual networks. AirTies can bridge this separation. We will provide gateway bridging, keep all the security in place, so you can get content from the Internet and from your home appliances. This will help the service provider to build better services because we maintain it.

OI: Has AirTies' role changed over time – for example, are AirTies strategies and/or products changing because of convergence and the drive toward more integration and connectivity among devices?

ZH: On the contrary, from day one, the vision of the company was to provide a completely wireless home network/connectivity, but both the technology and the customers were not yet ready for that. Even though it was part of our vision from the beginning, it was hard to implement. We essentially established our classical wired and wireless solutions, and also in the set-top domain. Later, when technology caught up to our idea, we started implementing a bigger-picture connectivity, maybe four or five months ago. I like to think we were ahead of the trend in our thinking, and right now we can see the future as promising, with so many ideas that we want to add to our home connectivity solutions.

OI: What do you see as the biggest opportunities that arise from the connected life idea? Both in general in the industry and for AirTies specifically?

ZH: Generally, one of the main opportunities is over-the-top TV, Web TV. Accessing content—we see all the research, a huge amount of content, user-generated and on YouTube, streamed from the Web. Right now people see it only on the PC. It is not that common to enjoy all this content on a TV. We have invested a lot of time in building an over-the-top STB to serve content from the PC, through the STB to TV. We aim to extend with online content directly from the Web, also supporting DTP (digital terrestrial programming). We are seeing growth in the number of subscribers. Many countries moved from analog to digital. There is a huge opportunity to combine home-connected appliances with the digital content. Network PVR devices can support all STBs at home and get content from home. Also with home connectivity, we see a tight correlation between VoIP and IPTV/STBs – because we have a VoIP product, we can add special services to extend VoIP usage. For example, caller ID. Because we have a footprint on the STB and the gateway, we can do it with the home domain – inside the home... without anyone having to do anything outside the home domain. Various examples are things like a phone book on TV, video calls, audio calls, STB as answering machine—it is all possible on the different appliances with the AirTies footprint.



OI: What are the biggest challenges of achieving the connected life idea?

ZH: Two big challenges – over-the-top TV presents some challenges in bringing better quality TV to the home on an unmanaged network. Everyone wants high-def video, with DTP you can do it, but with something like YouTube, high-def is a challenge.

In the home domain, the challenge is the quality of service inside the home – you get content from the Web, but face limited bandwidth sometimes. There is a need to maintain quality of service of data, video and audio access. It is a challenging task – and one of the barriers to having a good home-connectivity solution.

OI: What are some of your visions and insights about the future – both in terms of AirTies' place in the connected-home future and in the connected-home space in general?

ZH: Right now there is a very big trend for TVs that are already connected to the Internet – for the moment, this will bring only a simple, limited amount of services because, again, there is no standard in that sense. With regard to trends, again talking about over-the-top TV ... this is already a fact, not a trend.

We are involved with Opera in over-the-top TV on two projects, and we want to see ourselves as one of the best products in the domain. Part of catching an important trend alongside Opera, we are focusing on the performance of the graphic layer on STBs. This is changing and getting better and better. Silicon manufacturers are starting to support 3D and hardware acceleration, which Opera and AirTies use to create a truly fantastic UI. We are finally moving into a stage where the technology is ready, and we can harness it to declare that we will go beyond just a good UI – we can have an amazing, high-def UI that can ultimately be utilized to create a great user experience and augment and support the connected home idea.

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