



TELECOMMUNICATIONS

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4G versus 3G: Next Generation or Hoax?

Sprint recently announced that it is ready to launch its second 4G smartphone called the Samsung Epic. Just like Sprint's earlier phone the HTC Evo, the Samsung Epic touts itself as a 4G phone. Technological advances are always exciting, but what does "4G" really mean?

In October 2009, the International Telecommunications Union ("ITU") accepted six proposals to be assessed against the ITU-R requirements. This means that the proposals submitted to the ITU will be independently evaluated over the next several years around the world in order to determine what qualifies as "4G." That means that currently there is no one standard definition of "4G" technology. Yet, many companies are quick to tout their latest phone as having 4G service.

3G technology was the third evolution for the mobile phone industry. The ITU defined 3G technology, which in turn meant that companies had to comply with that definition. Although 3G technology provided great connection methods, there are a number of technologies included under the 3G definition. These technologies include WCDMA (Wideband Code Division Multiple Access), EV-DO (Evolution-Data Optimized), and HSPA (High Speed Packet Access).

3G technology was a big step forward in the industry. However, Apple's first iPhone, which touted 3G technology, actually used technology that was an evolution of 2.5G technology. Although the iPhone used 3G technology according to the ITU's definition, it did not give users the same data range as other 3G technology. The technology the first iPhone used was later developed further and was referred to as 3.5G technology because it was much faster.

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4G technology is digital, broadband, packet based, and all IP. 4G technology should also see greater throughput. Additionally, it goes without saying that greater bandwidth has a direct correlation to better quality. However, there is no definition of 4G technology. Yet, despite many companies' claims that they have 4G technology, such as LTE, WiMax, and UMB, because there are not yet any set specifications for the 4G standard, these technologies may not truly meet the definition of 4G in the future.

So, what does 4G mean today? It's not clear. Without a standard definition, 4G technology may really mean "something better than 3G."

Do you think that companies should be promoting 4G technology while they wait for standards to be set worldwide? Or does a standard definition of 4G technology even matter given that many different types of technology met the ITU's 3G definition in the past? We welcome your thoughts. Feel free to comment at our interactive blog at blog.tlgdc.com!

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