

TOOLS of the TRADE



Sprint HTC Hero

Sprint will launch its first Google Android smartphone, the HTC Hero, on October 11. The HTC Hero will synchronize with a number of built-in Google mobile services, including Google Search, Google Maps, Gmail, and YouTube, as well as more than 8,000 applications that have been built on the Android platform. The Hero has an integrated 5MP camera and camcorder. There's access to personal and business e-mail, instant messaging, and text messaging through POP, IMAP, and Exchange Active Sync accounts. Wi-Fi capable, the phone has a 3.2-inch touchscreen with pinch-to-zoom and a fingerprint resistive coating. There's integrated GPS naviga-

tion and Stereo Bluetooth 2.0 wireless. An accelerometer shifts the screen view as you turn the unit, and there are a light sensor and home screen widgets for improved usability. The microSD card slot comes with a 2GB card, but you can increase that to 32GB. HTC Sense offers seven home screens with a lot of freedom for customization. Other features include visual voice mail, Sprint TV, NFL Mobile Live, NASCAR Sprint Mobile, and a music player with a 3.5mm headset jack. The HTC Hero joins two other best sellers in the carrier's catalog, the BlackBerry Tour and the Palm Pre. Preregistration for the Hero is available at www.sprint.com/hero.

Refresh Recharger

The Bluelounge Refresh is a beautifully designed charging station for use in the office or

anywhere at home. It has six universal connectors in one neatly arranged tray. The plugs and cables store beneath the inclined, rubberized platform. You can charge up to four devices simultaneously, and the device is compatible with more than 1,000 products, including: Apple, BlackBerry, Creative, Dopod, Eten, Garmin, HP, HTC, i-mate, Insignia, Iqua, iRiver, Jabra, LG, Memorex, Motorola, Nokia, O2, Pal, Philips, Plantronics, Qtek, Samsung, Sanya, Sidekick, Sony, and Toshiba. There are USB sockets that allow you to plug in your own connectors to charge headsets and additional devices. Short USB connector cables are also available at Bluelounge for many others, including Nokia, Samsung, Palm, Sony Ericsson, LG, Sony PSP, Nintendo DS Lite, and more. The charging station can charge two iPod/iPhones at the

same time while also charging a BlackBerry and a Bluetooth headset. Actually, using the two iPod connectors and two of your own iPod cords, you could charge four iPod/iPhones at the same time. If you're charging the same devices, the cables, which are stored under the top tray, have some memory, so they will begin to assume the same configuration each time. The Refresh is available in white, black, and pink. There's an unboxing video on the site that explains the way it works.

www.bluelounge.com

Ezio Time Token

If you've decided to start working in the Amazon Web Services (AWS) Cloud, you can get an additional layer of security with the Ezio Time Token from Gemalto. The Ezio password generator is compatible with Amazon Web Services Multi-Factor Authentication. The operation of the hand-held device is extremely simple. There's a single button and a display screen. The Time Token generates a unique password that's valid for only one attempt and for 30 seconds. There's no software loaded on your PC. From the



TECH FORUM

eBay Liberates Skype

By Michael Castelluccio, Editor

On September 1, an eBay press release announced that the company had signed an agreement to sell its Skype communications unit in a deal valuing the business at \$2.75 billion. On the same day, on the Share Skype blog, Skype President Josh Silverman wrote, "Today, Skype begins a new chapter. We're spinning off from eBay to become an independent company once again. This is very exciting news for all of us here at Skype, and I want to give all of you a brief overview of what's happening. The new investors will buy approximately 65% of Skype, with eBay continuing to own 35%, in a deal valuing Skype at \$2.75 billion US. It means we're back to being a fully independent company again, but with a new group of owners who believe passionately in our mission and in the ability of our team to deliver on it. I can't wait."

Actually, both companies offered something of a collective sigh of relief. eBay Inc. President and CEO John Donahoe said, "This is a great deal, unlocking both immediate and long-term value for eBay and tremendous potential for Skype." It had been a bad marriage all around.

There had been plans for a separation beginning with an IPO of Skype in 2010. On the way to the IPO, eBay said it would accept offers for the company it had purchased back in 2005. An offer was made in August, and the deal was announced.

Three groups put together \$1.9 billion in cash for a majority share of 65% of the company. The new owners include Silver Lake Partners, two venture capital firms (Index Ventures and Andreessen Horowitz), and the Canada Pension Plan investment board. The Andreessen of Andreessen Horowitz is the same Marc Andreessen who cofounded Netscape.

A RETURN

Back when they bought Skype, eBay had hoped to

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and the Gemalto site is here:
<http://onlinenoram.gemalto.com>.

3M Mobile Privacy Films

As you spend more of your time reading your e-mail on hand-held devices, you make your information more susceptible to "shoulder-surfers." The screens are getting bigger, and the variety of information available on the portable displays is also increasing. For these reasons, 3M has adapted its computer privacy filter technology to a mobile format. The 3M Mobile Privacy Films use a micro-louver technology to function like blinds, darkening the view of those trying to read your screen at an oblique angle. A direct, in-front view is unaffected, but from the side there's a total blackout. In addition to the security, the film has a light

matte front surface to reduce glare and help protect the screen from scratches. The full surface adhesive is removable and can be lifted and readjusted. Pre-cut custom sizes fit most popular phones and personal digital assistants (PDAs).

www.3mprotectionfilms.com

Amazon FAQ, this is how the device works in the AWS Cloud: "AWS MFA uses an authentication device that continually generates random, six-digit authentication codes solely for your use. Once you enable AWS MFA, every time somebody tries to sign in to your secure pages on the AWS website or AWS Management Console, access will only be granted after the correct Amazon email-id and password (the first "factor": something you know) and the current code from your authentication device (the second "factor": something you have) are provided." The full FAQ is here: http://aws.amazon.com/mfa/faqs/#What_is_AWS_MFA,



include it as a communication tool for its community of buyers and sellers. Skype is a free telephone and text service that resides on the Internet, and eBay wanted to set up a community dialogue enabled by a click-to-comment function that would run on Skype. It never caught on.

Meanwhile, Skype was put in the uncomfortable position of being controlled by a larger company that found it was making very little money on this very expensive investment.

In his remarks to the press, eBay's John Donahoe described Skype as "a great standalone business," and a number of commentators agree. Brad Stone, in his reporting in *The New York Times*, explained the deal would "essentially allow Skype to go back into start-up mode. For example, it will be able to conceal investments in projects and new technologies from the public—and from rivals—instead of disclosing them in eBay's public regulatory filings." There's also the chance, Stone points out, that the new owners will launch an IPO of their own, allowing the company to tempt new employees with its own stock as part of the compensation.

It isn't that Skype has been a failure in what it offers users. Growth has been very impressive. Skype had a reported 276 million users in the first quarter of 2008, and that number had grown to 480 million registered Skype users in July 2009. It's just that it didn't fit eBay.

Egon Durban, the managing director at Silver Lake Partners, praised Skype, calling it, "One of the leading Internet franchises with terrific growth prospects." It hasn't escaped notice that one of the major investors includes one of the Internet's legendary pioneers, Andreessen.

With the announcement of the sale, there's been much speculation about what directions the company may now be free to take off to. A lot of the guessing focuses on the video calls that are one of the current services. There already has been dramatic movement with a recent deal to add Skype on Nokia phones as well as the Skype application for iPhones, which was released in March and has been extremely well received in the U.S. and just made available in the Canadian iPhone stores.

SKYPE'S PAST AND FUTURE

Skype, like eBay, is one of the Internet's purebreds. A very young company, it was founded in 2003 by Niklas




Zennström, a Swede, and Janus Friis, a Dane. The company is based in Luxembourg. The program's code actually was written by three Estonian developers: Ahti Heinla, Priit Kasesalu, and Jaan Tallinn. Estonia has quietly become one of the most wired countries on earth—a place where elections are held online and citizens file their income taxes in minutes, also online.

The name Skype evolved from the program's original name—Sky peer-to-peer. A very natural choice for the Estonian programmer group because they were also responsible for Kazaa, one of the most popular peer-to-peer file-sharing applications. The group also later developed Joost, an Internet television service based on a peer-to-peer model.

The company describes its current offerings this way: "Skype is software that enables the world's conversations. Millions of individuals and businesses use Skype to make free video and voice calls, send instant messages, and share files with other Skype users. Everyday, people everywhere also use Skype to make low-cost calls to landlines and mobiles."

The basic sign-up is free, and with that you can call any other Skype member online and speak with them, text them, or communicate over a video connection. For about \$3 a month you can upgrade the service and call landlines and cell phones in the United States. About \$13 a month will add more than 40 countries. There's a program for using landline phones to reach a Skype user, voice and video conferencing, and something called Skype to Go, which will let you make international calls on your mobile phone at Skype-Out rates that apply to calls made from your computer.

With the sale, the skies have opened again for Skype. **SF**