
Hello Out There *OpenMoko unlocks the future of the mobile phone.*

Frustrated with your cell phone's feature set? Unless you're a hacker with a soldering iron, there's not much you can do about it. An OpenMoko phone, on the other hand, starts its life as a blank slate, completely at your mercy: The world's first open-source cell-phone platform, it's built on nonproprietary GNU-licensed Linux-based software, allowing independent developers to make improvements and customizations far beyond wallpapers and ringtones. Consumers then get to reap the benefits.

American Sean Moss-Pultz conceived OpenMoko after becoming product manager for Taiwanese manufacturer First International Computer, where he resented having to churn out Windows Mobile devices. His team eventually began developing a free and open-source platform that could run on a smartphone he dubbed the Neo1973, a reference to the *Matrix* movies and the year of the first mobile phone call, two worlds in which Moss-Pultz believes cell phones are trapped. Early on, the team opened the project to international developers, who provided essential feedback. "OpenMoko, in my mind, is both a company and a community," Moss-Pultz says. "We are inseparable."

Those same developers will continue building value for the phone after its mass-market launch this fall. As with Firefox, the open-source web browser, anyone can create new plug-

ins, which become available to end users via an application manager. Those currently in development range from the banal (OpenMoko Sudoku) to the potentially life-changing (an image-based communication tool for aphasiacs). And because the Neo1973 arrives unlocked, it can be used on any network.

The Neo ships without features like Wi-Fi (for now) and a camera, so it may not deliver the same polished experience as smartphones from established companies. But it represents the vanguard. Surj Patel, co-chair of the O'Reilly Emerging Telephony Conference and occasional phone hacker, says, "OpenMoko isn't so much a wireless handset as it is a wireless hand grenade." Translation: OpenMoko could have the explosive impact on the cell-phone market that the Apple II had on PCs a generation ago. Moss-Pultz is counting on it. "OpenMoko

people are creators," he says. "With Neo, the end users"—rather than the manufacturer—"will make it insanely great. And we trust our users more than a single individual."

www.openmoko.org — JESSE ASHLOCK

