

Executive Profile — Naser Partovi

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Every day, tekkies, executives and jet-setters boot up their “smart phone,” or personal digital assistant, complete with QWERTY keyboard and an operating system — just like a hand-held computer.

According to Naser Partovi, chief executive officer of San Diego-based Sky MobileMedia Inc., that operating system is probably Windows or Symbian — companies that cover the 10 percent of the cell phone market taken by smart phones and personal digital assistants, or PDAs.

“We are providing operating systems for the other 90 percent,” Partovi said of his company.

That’s a market of 900 million non-smart phones, also known as “feature phones,” Partovi said. Sky sells its software to cell phone manufacturers directly and the company has agreements with seven of the top 10 handset manufacturers.

Partovi began his work with Sky as an investor with San Diego-based Enterprise Partners Venture Capital.

The previous founders of Sky explained to Partovi that many feature phones don’t have fully integrated operating systems.

“Cell phone manufacturers said, ‘If you can give us one integrated solution instead of us Krazy-Gluing applications, we’ll take it.’ ”

In its San Diego office, Sky has 35 employees, with 135 worldwide, but Partovi wants to grow the company in a hurry.

“It might sound like we’re a big company, but we deal with (companies that) wish we were bigger,” Partovi said.

“We need to buy other companies because we can’t grow that fast organically. Not to mention we’re competing with Microsoft and Symbian.”

RESUME

Name: Naser Partovi.

Job title: Chief executive officer.



Company name: Sky MobileMedia Inc.

Education: Master of engineering, McGill University, Montreal; bachelor of honors in engineering, McGill.

Born: 1955.

Birthplace: Iran.

Age: 51.

Residence: San Diego.

Family: Wife, two daughters.

BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY

Essential business philosophy: Always find a real business problem and try to find a solution for it.

Best way to keep a competitive edge: Don't become focused on competitors, but focus on meeting the customer's needs.

The latest industry trend: Company consolidation — when you look at the cell phone industry, all the operators have merged. On the handset side, Nokia and Motorola are 62 percent of the market and the top five own 90 percent of the market.

Goal achieved: Closing the e-Sim purchase.

Goals yet to be achieved: Negotiations with three or four other companies up for acquisition.

JUDGMENT CALLS

Best career decision: I left Nortel (as vice president of business development) at the height of the bubble, in the summer of 2000.

Toughest career decision: I left Nortel at the height of the bubble. It was a very tough decision because things were going well.

Missed opportunity: I should have left two years earlier. There were some great opportunities I said "no" to.

Mentor: Chairman of Sky MobileMedia, Ake Persson.

I've been told: Sometimes I'm too focused and I miss the fun, which is true, I'm very competitive.

TRUE CONFESSIONS

What I like best about running Sky MobileMedia: I'm in the middle of an amazing industry, one that's going through huge changes and it's a wonderful position.

What I like least about my position: Travel, travel, travel ... 40 percent of the year, I'm traveling.

Pet peeve: Travel.

Most valuable lesson learned: If you cannot reach a goal, set a higher goal (Abe Lincoln). A natural instinct is to set a smaller goal, but that's wrong.

Person I'd most like to meet: Warren Buffett.

Most-respected competitor: Symbian.

Greatest passions: First is my family. Second is to build real businesses that can last well beyond me.

If I had it to do all over I'd: ... Do it all over again.

What I'd be doing if I weren't doing this: I guess I'd be doing something very similar. I keep telling my kids that I'm doing something I love and I get paid for it.

PREDILECTIONS

Favorite author/book: John Fowles, "The Magus."

Favorite status symbol: None.

Favorite vacation spot: All the places I haven't been yet.

If I could have any car, truck, sport utility vehicle, boat or airplane in the world, it would be: Vespa motor scooter.