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emporia Telecom presents the "*empathic corner*" at the GSMA Mobile World Congress Barcelona 2011.

Visitors see, hear and feel emporia's world of communications

LINZ. emporia Telecom does not just develop mobile phones for its customers but what is quite crucial, develops the phones *with* them. The Austrian specialist for easy-to-use mobile phones places great value on knowing what the needs of the various user groups are. This topic is one of the company's focal points at its exhibition stand at the GSMA Barcelona. In the "*empathic corner*" visitors can experience on their own bodies the effects of the way in which our senses change over the course of life.

emporia Telecom, the specialist in the field of mobile phones for senior citizens, works closely with Ian Hosking, an expert at the renowned University of Cambridge. His philosophy is "beyond big buttons", meaning simply that it is not enough just to develop mobile phones with big buttons but that both physical changes in old age and the different user needs and wishes should be taken into account. Via the Inclusive Design approach it is possible to develop products which can be handled well by people of all ages and which they like using.

Simple, attractive and functional

"We try to develop products which are so simple to use that no-one is excluded from using them. At the same time attractive design is important so that the user is not stigmatised. That is what emporia Telecom understands by 'Inclusive Design'," explains Albert Fellner, emporia's founder about the company's primary approach in product development. In addition, 40 and 50 year olds have completely different ideas about what a mobile phone should be able to do than do 60 or 70 year olds. "We would like to fulfil the different requirements and wishes via various mobile phone models which are equipped with a few user-specific functions, emphasized Fellner. To this end it is necessary to be well informed about and to understand the life situation of the different user groups.

"empathic corner" at the exhibition stand

In the "empathic corner" at its exhibition stand, emporia Telecom offers visitors a small world of experience. With the aid of the *empathic tool kit* comprising a glove and goggles, visitors have the opportunity to put themselves in the position of potential users. Glove and goggles were developed at the University of Cambridge. They are considered to be the most interactive and tangible approach to evaluating the user friendliness of a product. The special glove restricts the mobility of the fingers, the goggles ensure blurred vision. In the "empathic corner" visitors simulate the effects that the deterioration of sight, hearing and touch have on our use of technical gadgets and everyday devices. They can, for example test how difficult it is to use a mobile phone with small keys and a small display, to use nail scissors or to open a bottle.

In the "empathic corner" monitors are available on which, for example, a grey blur can be activated which makes it more difficult to read small writing. At a listening station headphones can be put on to simulate the hearing of 80 year-olds. In addition to these practical experiments the visitors can discover many interesting snippets of information, figures and facts about the ageing process in humans.

Changes in motor skills and sensory abilities

Most people are not aware that physical restrictions do not only occur in 60 or 70 year olds. As early as in the mid-thirties sight and hearing start to diminish, the sense of touch even starts to fail at 30. "They are nuances which people perhaps do not notice but which are a result of the natural ageing process. They make it more difficult to cope with technical gadgets which have not been adapted to cope with these changes," explains Eveline Pupetner-Fellner, the Managing Director and owner of emporia Telecom.

The physical changes in the human body in figures

Sight

From the age of 40 the human eye becomes, for example, more sensitive to glare and it is harder for it to adapt to strong light. From the age of 50 acuity decreases markedly and the flexibility of the lens lessens. At about the age of 70 colour perception also deteriorates. Red, orange and yellow can still be recognized relatively well.

Hearing

For men, hearing starts to deteriorate at the beginning of the 30s, for women at about 37 years of age. In the mid 40s people increasingly regard background noises as distracting. Every second person between 45 and 65 has hearing problems. From about 70 years of age, age induced hearing loss starts and one person in two suffers from hearing loss.

Touch

The sensitivity of human skin starts to deteriorate from the age of about 30. Over the course of life the flexibility of bones, muscles and joints deteriorates by up to 20 per cent.

"These changes and their negative effects on the use of technical gadgets is difficult to imagine if you have never experienced them yourself," says Pupeter. "In our '*empathic corner*' we would like to give visitors the opportunity to try everything out for themselves and take a look at the future – which is perhaps closer than we think."

emporia's main target groups

In Austria alone there are about 1.4 million people over the age of 65. That is 17.5% of the total population of Austria. The number of older people is continually growing in relation to the younger generation. Older people are and will continue to be an important target group. That is a fact that emporia recognized long ago. However, emporia's main target groups are not primarily determined by age. In fact, the three groups of emporia's "typical" users have something else in common - easy handling of the devices is particularly important to them.

The first group comprises the non-technical 50 to 69 year olds who use their mobile phones less frequently than once a week. In the second group are people in their 60s who are health-conscious and safety-conscious. Safety plays a key role for them and as a result mobile phones are their constant companion. The third group comprises family-conscious people between 40 and 49 who mainly use the basic functions of mobile phones.

Based on this knowledge emporia Telecom develops mobile phones whose use is as simple, comfortable and helpful as possible for all age groups.

Captions

Photos: emporia Telecom (free of charge)

The *empathic tool kit* (comprising glove and goggles) ensures blurred vision and restricts the mobility of the fingers, simulating those of elderly people. The hurdles in using everyday objects e.g. mobile phones are thus shown clearly.



Ian has over 20 years of experience of working in Industry with a focus on the effective application of technology through understanding people's needs. Ian led the team that conducted the ground breaking exclusion study for Vodafone which estimated that 9% of the European population over 16 is excluded from the most basic mobile usage. Ian joined the Engineering Design Centre at the University of Cambridge in June 2009. His interests include the convergence of inclusive and sustainable design.



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