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Sunplus beefs up cellular chip design team

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[Sunplus](#) Technology is rapidly building up an engineering team to strengthen its push into chips for cellphones. The move should result in design wins by the end of this year for its 2.75G offering and in a new [3G chipset](#) platform in 2007.

Late last year, Sunplus acquired a team of 40 engineers who were working on W-CDMA designs at a government-sponsored institute. Since then, the company has hired 80 more. The team splits its focus between supporting Sunplus' [Edge platform](#), which includes a reference design, and tackling the challenges of 3G development.

The company isn't offering much detail about the work yet, but it has confirmed that it will offer a combined baseband/application processor, an analog component and an RF part that it will initially source from a partner.

Sunplus is intensifying its effort to break into the cellular-chip market just as one of its top Taiwan rivals, [Mediatek](#), is enjoying the payoff of a decision to move into such chips a few years ago. Once known only for optical-disk ICs, Mediatek now derives about 30 percent of its revenue from 2G chipset sales. It does particularly well in China, where it has leveraged old relationships with optical-IC customers such as Lenovo, now one of China's top domestic cellphone brands. Mediatek has also gathered the necessary building blocks, such as intellectual property in Wi-Fi, GPS and DVB, to make a run in the 3G and advanced feature phone markets.

3G chipset

Last year, Sunplus gained its first experience in cellular by designing a chipset for China's personal handyphone system (PHS) market. It targeted mid- and low-end phones, while PHS newcomer Atheros targeted high-end phones. In that project, Sunplus also sourced the RF transceiver from a partner, Airoha Technology.

Sunplus intends to target mid-tier phones with its 3G chipset. That should allow the company to integrate its existing multimedia processor with the baseband processor, since applications for the mid-tier platforms are quite mature, said Wayne Shen, an executive at Sunplus.

"It's not like three years ago, when features were changing quarter by quarter. The features are stable now, so we can combine them and use hardware acceleration for the multimedia," he said.

Sunplus has had a multimedia processor for some time, but Shen acknowledged that working the protocol stacks and integrating the software for the baseband has been a challenge. And because of the complexities of RF design, Sunplus will need a transceiver partner for some time, Shen said.

Aside from Mediatek, no other company in Taiwan has a complete cellular chipset offering. A handful offer multimedia processors for phones, but the few companies that do work on RF transceivers have focused thus far on WLANs. Airoha, however, has developed a PHS transceiver, and its road map includes products for 2.5G transceivers.

- **Mike Clendenin**
EE Times

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