3G, a battle with an uncertain benefit
Francesc Miralles, e-Business Center Associated Researcher

A new war has started in the ICT framework. On the one hand, Microsoft has established an alliance with Intel. On the other hand, Nokia, Motorola, Sony-Ericsson, Siemens and recently, Samsung are allying under the Symbian name to put up a hard fight against Gates’ company. It seems that they are gambling for the 3G mobile phone market.

The giant of Redmond has decided to transfer its personal management platform, calendar, journal, navigator, mail and others applications to the cell phone environment. The rest of producers grouped in Symbian are focused on searching for a standard platform of open applications, independent from the Linux type operating system.

It is, no doubt, a battle on levels, hardware and software, but in the same battlefield. Although Microsoft is trying to disassociate itself from the hardware market with the argument that the major competitors of mobile makers are wireless network operators, the truth is that Symbian is endangering Microsoft’s plans of extending its business of software licensing sales to mobile phones.

For their part, Symbian members maintain that their initiative gives value to mobile phone producers (whom they represent) and prevents, through Microsoft’s performance, mobile devices from becoming a commodity, without any possibility of differentiating among them, just like what happened to PCs.

Who will finally pull it off? To answer this question it is necessary to bear in mind the background to this crusade. After years of exorbitant forecasts such as “this year sales are going to multiply for four” or “in three years, two out of every five sold mobile phones will be 3G devices”, the growth of the mobile phone market is beginning to remind us of the Internet bubble in the late nineties, and invites us to think about if there is really anything to pull off.

Above all because it is unknown what applications will appeal to users. From the shyness which seems to be kept out of the discussion, service and software providers are trying to agglutinate the current offer to seduce the consumer.

As Don Listwin, CEO of the mobile phone software vendor Openwave Systems, insisted at the GSM World Congress held last week in Cannes, “it is necessary to focus on the user”.