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Everywhere you look these days, cellular companies are touting new lines of 4G-enabled products. All four of the major cellular companies — which will shortly be reduced to three, if AT&T gets its way and swallows up T-Mobile — have announced ambitious plans to deploy 4G networks. Even President Obama has gotten into the act, declaring 4G broadband over cellular to be and answer to the nation's broadband woes.

Which would be lovely, if any of it actually existed. But it does not.

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that a “4G” device has to meet. This is a lengthy list, but for our purposes the key standard that counts is that it be able to set peak speeds of 100 Megabits per second for high-mobility communication (car, train, etc.) and a whopping 1 Gigabit per second for low-mobility communication such as pedestrians and stationary users.

The trouble is that it is taking a while to create networks and devices that can achieve the standard, and the cellular market is driven by the need to have new generations of hardware to sell to the young, geeky rubes who judge the value of a phone by its marketing campaign. With 4G dragging on, and some technical problems encountered in field testing, the cell phone companies came up with a minor sleight of hand.

They convinced the ITU to decree that a device could be called 4G, even if it is not, so long as the manufacturer promised that the device was in some way better than standard 3G and in some way was a “forerunner” of the real thing.

Here's why you have to be careful of this kind of nonsense and refuse to play along: What happens if the standards change on the way to the future? You might think this couldn't happen, but it easily can. Just look at another standard from the ITU, the v.90 modem. As the market moved to this fastest-ever modem in the Nineties, two competing standards emerged — the K56Flex and the X2. The companies pounded out thousands of pre-standard models, virtually all of which became useless when the ITU elected to take elements of both for the final standard.

That's not the only reason to take care. Even if companies begin to deploy 4G this year, it will take years before it actually gets to where you can use it reliably everywhere you need it. Remember, we still don't have 3G in a lot of the country. Truth be known, we don't have cell coverage at all in a lot of the country.

And in those years, most anything could happen. A new technology may emerge.

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to every one of them in addition to the existing towers.

That's fine for areas where fiber abounds, but get a mile or two past the city limits and ... nothing.

That's another reason — maybe the real reason — that they are calling 3G networks and devices “4G.”

How long companies will be able to string the public along before consumers howl in outrage is anyone's guess, but it is notable that Sprint and cell phone maker HTC were slapped with a class-action lawsuit for fraud over their 4G claims.

So the rule for purchasing a 4G device or switching to a “4G” network remain: ‘Let the buyer beware.’

Reality Check

A compendium of ideas, products, rants and raves from the viewpoint of the author. Not that the author has no financial interests in any of the products mentioned. Feel free to disagree, or to share your ideas by sending them to dave.mcclure@cpapractice.com.

Internet Site of the Month. Gizmodo. (<http://www.gizmodo.com>). For those of us with a geek streak a mile wide, knowing the latest, cutting-edge news about devices and gizmos is what life is all about. And this is the site for us. Quirky, fun, interesting and ever-changing, this is a site worth looking at.

[Thumbs Up] – **Samsung Series 9.** This must be the month for Apple competitors to arise. This time it is the debut of the thin, sleek and powerful Samsung to take on the Mac Airbook. This is a lightweight laptop with a 13-inch screen, adequate peripheral

ports and speed that few laptops can achieve. If there is a down side to this beauty, it

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[Thumbs Sideways] – **The BlackBerry Playbook.** Now that it is finally out, it's time to take a serious look at the Playbook. After all, this was supposed to be an iPad competitor only built for business. The iPad has been a little too breezy and less than useful. The clones have been underpowered or poorly designed. Can the Playbook take on the iPad? We're going to find out...

[Thumbs Down] – **Hollywood versus Netflix.** I like the idea of Netflix, and like even more its movie streaming service. Flat-rate, good quality delivery, and a decent selection of movies, even if they are a little old. Which is why I am furious that the dinosaurs running the major film studios are conspiring to kill the service as a threat to their own ambitions. Sure, they own the films, but if we wait until the movie moguls figure out the Internet, I'll be long buried before a single film appears over the Internet.

[Thumbs Up] – **The Oxford English Dictionary.** You have to love those dictionary guys. They are catching up fast with the addition of a slew of new initial-isms from the Internet, and now included as legal words for your Scrabble game are OMG, IMHO, TMI, FYI, LOL and even BFF. They also added a new verb — ♥ — which apparently means “to heart” something.

Technology

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