



Chronicles

the Insider

Per Erik Boivie

A mobile phone race has started

(Nov 8, 2000)

The world will soon have more mobile phones than automobiles. While the number of mobile phones grows larger, the phones themselves get smaller. Manufacturers compete with miniaturization and light weight, which means that users must be highly dexterous to be able to push the phone keys. Good eyesight and good lighting help - or else the user can't see the text on the small display screen.

However, these tiny phones are excellent while "resting" in a shirt pocket.

For automobiles, the trend is just the opposite. Inspired by the USA, where fuel prices are extremely low compared to the rest of the world, large, gasoline-guzzling, greenhouse gas emitting SUVs, with questionable safety, have also become fashionable in Europe. For the sake of drivers, fellow motorists, the environment and private economy, the best advice is: let's not buy it!

This raises questions: Who really care about users? Who cares about the environment? How much do manufacturers care about people and the environment when developing products?

There are no simple answers. Political leaders take action, primarily through legislation to protect health and the environment. And in the market, some manufacturers take more consideration than others, and they view the good of users and the environment as a competitive advantage.

But the most important development in the market right now is the quiet mobilization of "user power". All signs indicate that we are on the threshold of a new industrial revolution, in which users discover how to use the Internet to influence global technological developments.

When people learn to use the Net as a tool for exert influence, industry will be forced to listen. The results will be products and services much better suited to people and the environment.

Sweden has more computers and mobile phones per capita than any nation. We lead in wireless Internet development. Small, innovative companies – the number of which has sharply increased in recent years – now look toward global markets. The Internet has created opportunities for future visions and new business.

But Sweden also has something more: strong user organizations with global perspectives. These organizations have innovative specialties. They already influence product development in IT companies worldwide.

Take computer monitors, for example. Today, there are almost 200 million people using PCs whose screens are marked TCO '92, TCO '95 or TCO '99. Very few know that TCO stands for Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation (The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees), a trade union with 1.2 million members.

This organization, in which 80 percent of members use computers as a working tool, created the requirements for quality and environment certification for monitors on the world market. The requirements include ergonomic factors, picture quality, electromagnetic emissions, energy consumption, and strict ecological demands to limit spread of dangerous pollutants in nature.

Requirements are very strict. And they are continually strengthened. Improvements are based on users' experience and demands as well as on research results.

All the "Top 10 Monitors" in the May 2000 listing by American magazine PC-World were TCO certified. The ratings were based on tests by the magazine's own testing center in San Francisco.

How was this achievement possible for a Swedish trade union? The answer is in the union's having a vision, confidence in the future, determination to gain knowledge, and a global network. An important point was the union's utilizing users' experience and knowledge as an essential part of a process to create value. Application of IT and the Internet was extremely useful.

The Web site www.tco-info.com provides consumers worldwide with information about certified products and about requirements. The certification program now not only covers picture screens but system components, keyboards, lap-tops, faxes, printers and copiers.

Manufacturers who qualify for quality and environment certification of their products can reach world markets through this international Web site. At the same time, users and company purchasers have the opportunity to choose between hundreds of different models. A win-win situation has been created.

TCO is now preparing for the next task: certification of mobile phones. Preparations are moving ahead at full speed. Survey forms for users' demands and wishes are available at <http://www.tco.se/index.htm> Expert groups are developing specifications to meet certification requirements.

It will be interesting to see which manufacturer can deliver the first TCO-certified mobile phone. Will Nokia take the lead again, just as it did with monitor screens in the early 1990s? Or will it be Ericsson, Motorola or possibly Samsung? The race has started!

Per Erik Boivie
pererik@boivie.nu

The author is the initiator and leader of the TCO certification program. He now heads his own workplace consultant company, Boivie Arbetsplatsutveckling AB. He has been awarded an honorary Doctor of Philosophy at Uppsala University for his contributions to the field of picture screens.

<http://www.tco-info.com/>
www.tco.se/index.htm

[print this page](#)

(Mac users: press and P)

<http://www.itsweden.com/>