



Bluetooth SIG and EHIMA Partner to Advance Hearing Instrument Technology to Improve the Lives of the Hearing Impaired

Kirkland, Washington and Copenhagen, Denmark – March 03, 2014 – Concurrent with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) International Ear Care Day, the Bluetooth Special Interest Group (SIG) and European Hearing Instrument Manufacturers Association (EHIMA) today announced a memo of understanding (MOU). This partnership between the world’s largest association of hearing instrument manufacturers and the largest wireless technology aims to develop a standard for new hearing aids, while improving existing features, and creating new ones such as stereo audio from a mobile device or media gateway with Bluetooth® wireless technology.

The new Bluetooth standard is expected to be rapidly adopted by consumer electronics manufacturers, once it has been finalized, presumably in 2016.

With the recent revolution in smartphones, personal music players, TVs and tablets, tens of millions of people with hearing impairments are underserved as few hearing instruments offer direct connectivity to these devices. This means that many users are limited to what the manufacturer provides and cannot customize or add new functionality to the hearing aid. Building on the proliferation of Bluetooth technology in the smart devices consumers already own, the addition of Bluetooth in hearing devices provides users with a customizable and higher quality hearing experience. Additionally, the low-power, intelligent connectivity provided by Bluetooth Smart brings about new scenarios to improve the user experience for those with hearing impairments. Today, however, no standardization of these solutions exists.

“It is important that we connect to and serve all kinds of smartphones and multimedia sound signals,” says EHIMA secretary general, Soren Hougaard. “In order to achieve that, we must define a standard everyone can implement. We want to avoid the situation that occurred in the market for videotapes in the 1980s where customers had to choose among 3-5 tape formats and corresponding VCRs. That was a nightmare!”

Currently, the only standard for wireless reception of audio signals in hearing aids is the telecoil, which dates back to the 1950s. This technology is difficult to incorporate into smartphones. Furthermore, the number of installed loop systems that can transmit audio signals to hearing aids with telecoils varies greatly from country to country. As a result, hearing aid users have limited access to high quality audio signals from external sources. Building on the existing Bluetooth standard that is widely supported in today’s smartphones, tablets and personal computers will give more hearing-impaired users the same choice of products and opportunities as everyone else.

“It is really exciting to see Bluetooth technology used to improve people’s lives in such a fundamental way, and to explore how Bluetooth Smart can improve current hearing instruments with its amazing power performance and enable entirely new ways for people to customize their hearing experience,” said Mark Powell, Executive Director, Bluetooth SIG. “We look forward to working with EHIMA to bring hearing



technology into the Internet of My Things — connecting hearing aids and other personal sensor devices to a smartphone, tablet or PC, with the magic of Bluetooth and Bluetooth Smart.”

Bluetooth and Bluetooth Smart technology are crucial to transforming the hearing-impaired user’s experience. Extending existing and/or developing a new hearing aid profile that allows streaming of audio sources at mono speech or stereo music quality is only the first step. Several use cases will be supported, including calling with a mobile phone, enjoying stereo audio from multi-media devices (music players, radio, television, etc.) and receiving broadcast audio information from public address and announcement systems. This new hearing aid profile will be developed to meet the challenging power requirements of hearing aids, which have to operate with sub-miniature batteries.

The Bluetooth SIG and EHIMA members will further evaluate the feasibility for Bluetooth technology to accommodate hearing aid use case requirements, including compatibility, audio quality, security, and power within the Bluetooth SIG working groups. To apply for participation in the working groups, visit <https://www.bluetooth.org/groups/group.aspx?gId=605>

About EHIMA

EHIMA represents the six major European hearing instrument manufacturers, producing up to 90% of hearing aids made in Europe. EHIMA was founded in 1985 and the members are among the world’s largest and most advanced hearing aid manufacturers. Members of EHIMA develop, manufacture and market hearing instruments on a large scale in one or more countries in Europe and export their products worldwide, as well.

About Bluetooth® Wireless Technology

Bluetooth wireless technology is the global wireless standard enabling simple, secure connectivity for an expanding range of devices and serves as the backbone of the connected world. Bluetooth Smart technology, through an updatable platform and low power consumption, creates new application opportunities for the mobile phone, consumer electronics, PC, automotive, health & fitness and smart home industries. With over two billion devices shipping annually, Bluetooth is the wireless technology of choice for developers, product manufacturers, and consumers worldwide. Backed by industry leading companies, the Bluetooth SIG empowers over 20,000 member companies to collaborate, innovate and guide Bluetooth wireless technology. For more information, please visit www.bluetooth.com.

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