



## New FireWire Promises Robust, Simpler Applications To Go Against USB

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FireWire/1394 is getting a new direction as the 1394 Trade Association (TA) will develop a low-cost high-performance standard called VersaPHY, which promises to spur use of the connectivity technology in a new generation of simplified applications. VersaPHY will also place the technology in more direct competition with USB.

Expected to be formally announced later this week, enhancements -- fully compatible with all existing [1394](#) products -- will take advantage of 1394's high [speed](#) and, most importantly, its robust capability to extend the technology's long distance reach to more than 75 meters and higher. The 1394 technology is also known as [FireWire](#).

VersaPHY will actually enable designers to remove some software and [protocol](#) features, allowing the creation of simpler product designs, according to the TA.

"The VersaPHY is another tool in the 1394 arsenal, which enables the simplicity of [USB](#) with connections to a 1394 network that fully supports all existing 1394 applications such as mass storage, Internet protocol and real time streaming," said the TA's Richard Mourn.

Mourn, an executive at Quantum Parametrics LLC, noted that much of the simplification is due to the fact that the VersaPHY [architecture](#) change enables the creation of products including sensors, microphones, cameras, [speakers](#) to be built without a [link](#) controller, 1394 transaction software or a microprocessor.

"The idea is to get some of the software and protocols out with this enhancement," said Dick Davies, TA spokesman, noting that end-user products utilizing the VersaPHY technology should begin reaching the market in a year. VersaPHY's expanded PHY layer supports low-bandwidth asynch [peer-to-peer](#) communication along with high-bandwidth, real-time streaming without the necessity for link, transaction, or management layers within the VersaPHY device.

The simple VersaPHY requirements should enable designers to shave prices on a new class of product. As an example, Davies cited the automotive industry, which currently uses IEEE-1394 for entertainment and navigation systems. By dropping some software overhead by using VersaPHY technology, he said additional product features could be combined with existing 1394-based features.

"For example in an automobile seat, basic functions such as seat positioning, cooling/heating, seat belt sensors and lumbar support can be directly mapped into the VersaPHY registers, without an intervening software or protocol layer," the TA's announcement states.

"The VersaPHY device can [monitor](#) the sensors and notify a controller when conditions change, or these registers could be written by a [controller](#) to drive the actuators. This capability enables a significant cost reduction because a simple low-cost 1394 connection for items like seats can be located on the same 1394 network used for entertainment and navigation."

Davies noted that the distance capability of VersaPHY will enable an entire airplane to be outfitted in a single application. Use of the technology in aviation could permit dramatic reduction in weight and wire harness complexities. The expanded distance feature -- with a reach of more than 75 meters -- would give the new 1394 technology a leg up on USB in some applications. USB's reach is typically just a few feet.

Low [bandwidth](#) applications will enable low-speed devices to "carry simultaneous streams of full-quality HD video

and high-speed Internet, enabling consumes to get far more service out of a single 1394 home network than with any other technology," the TA stated.

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