Smartphone RF Front-End Module Review

Description: The upcoming 5G communication technology is creating a new order in the communication market. All the major RF front-end players are battling to provide devices that could be integrated in smartphones. Not all technologies suit the 5G requirement, but every player could win something. There will be opportunities for low cost competitors in the SAW filter market for low band communications like GSM, 2G or 3G, as high quality competitors shift focus to the 4G and 5G market with BAW filters. This comes along with better integration of all the front-end communication devices, now in just one module. This is therefore the perfect time to examine every player, and particularly to compare integration technologies of the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) who make smartphones and the RF front-end module suppliers.

This comparative technology study provides technology data for RF front-end modules in smartphones. The report includes at least 16 front-end modules and several components found in five flagship smartphones: the Apple iPhone 7 Plus, Samsung Galaxy S7 Edge, Huawei P9, LG G5 and Xiaomi Mi5.

After teardowns of a large variety of smartphones, we have extracted and physically analyzed the main RF modules. We have studied their sizes and technologies, and present a large panel of OEM technical and economical choices and an overview of the market. The major players remain Broadcom/Avago and Qorvo but there are several other players, including Skyworks, Murata, Epcos/TDK, and we have analyzed their products.

The report includes a description of each component and statistical analyses for most front-end modules. It also tries to explain the OEMs’ choices and supplier tendencies. Wi-Fi and Bluetooth module analyses are not covered in this report.

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