

Singapore Showcase

MyGamma.com creates a buzz

For making the mobile space even bigger, Singapore's BuzzCity (www.buzzcity.com) won an award for the Best Mobile Social Networking Service at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona in February.

BuzzCity's mobile Internet community myGamma.com (www.mygamma.com) is the mobile equivalent of mySpace, letting members post personal profiles and blogs, contact old friends and meet new people across the mobile universe. However, it is not a MySpace rip-off.

"While we were working with paid mobile content in 2003, we noticed that users were responding positively to community features that allowed them to interact with one another," recalled BuzzCity's Chief Executive Officer Dr Lai Kok Fung. "We began exploring the idea of bringing social networking features into mobile phones. We gradually developed community tools like group discussions, private message boards, blogging, photo sharing, testimonials, virtual gifting and marriage over the years."

These features, he noted, are similar to those in social networking sites like MySpace, but there is one important difference. While they have to retain the emotional appeal of allowing users to connect and share with each other, the features have to work with the small and text-heavy screen of mobile phones.



Dr Lai (centre) receives the Best Mobile Social Networking Service Award from Dr Paul E. Jacobs (left), CEO of Qualcomm. On the right is Global Mobile Awards 2008 host Graham Norton.

Having identified their target market as users of mobile Internet, BuzzCity designed myGamma to appeal specifically to this segment, which mainly comprised the emerging middle class in the developing world and blue-collar workers in the developed world. "If we had followed the conventional wisdom of going after well-heeled people in the developed countries (that is, the knowledge workers), then our service would have reflected this bias," observed Dr Lai.

This would have been fatal, as the bulk of mobile Internet users tend to access the Internet exclusively through their phones, while fixed-line Internet users mostly prefer their PCs or laptops to the phone's small screen. "There is very little overlap between fixed-line Internet and mobile Internet users," said Dr Lai, "and companies that pursue the intersect are very likely to fail."

So far, their marketing, via mobile Internet, has been spot on, with 2.5 million members from 66 countries taking up their free registration. "Our biggest markets are South Africa, India, Indonesia and Thailand. We are now seeing great growth from Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Traffic from UK, the Baltic countries and some Eastern European countries such as Romania is very encouraging, too."

In awarding the prize, the judges commented, "Let the people speak. Rapidly growing social network site spanning borders, cultures and languages. The world just got a lot smaller – and smarter."

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