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Want to monetise your mobile site?

When people talk about mobile advertising, they are usually referring to SMS-based ads where messages are sent to mobile phone subscribers. Sometimes, these ad messages are requested by subscribers who opted in. A lot of the time, however, they are sent to subscribers who never agreed to receive them, in which case it's a form of spam.

This kind of mobile advertising is referred to as "push" advertising. There's another kind of mobile advertising that's WAP-based, which is "pull" advertising. By its very nature, it cannot be spam because it appears only when the subscriber goes to a mobile site.

While mobile "push" ads are common in this part of the world — who among us has not received spam SMS? — mobile "pull" ads are something new. There are just not that many local WAP sites around and telco WAP portals seldom carry ads. So, few people have experienced these kinds of ads.

The industry refers to such ads as mobile display ads. Google calls them mobile image ads. Perhaps, the most accurate description is WAP banner ads. But whatever you call them, they look to be the future of mobile advertising as more and more WAP sites emerge.

Over in the US and the UK, AdMob is a key mobile ad player. In China, there's a mobile ad outfit called MadHouse. A little closer to home, in Singapore, there's one called BuzzCity, which is really quite impressive.

When you're doing business in Blue Ocean territory, you have to play a role in almost every aspect of the value chain. For BuzzCity, that means creating a mobile social networking site, enabling mobile commerce and having a sophisticated mobile ad serving business.

BuzzCity helps mobile content publishers monetise their traffic through mobile display ads much like how AdMob does it, but with more options. AdMob sells ads purely on a cost-per-click (CPC) basis, which means the advertiser only pays when someone clicks on the ad. BuzzCity offers that but it also sells ads based on cost-per-thousand impressions (CPM).

Some advertisers prefer CPC because you pay based on performance but there are also advertisers who don't care about click-through rates because what they are trying to achieve is branding. So, as long as the user sees the ad, that's good enough. Naturally, click-based ads cost more per unit than impression-based ads, which are so cheap that they are measured in batches of 1,000.

When a mobile content publisher signs up with BuzzCity, it receives a set of codes to paste onto the WAP pages where it wants the banner ads to appear. The publisher will be able to view campaign statistics, select advertiser categories and track the revenue generated.

BuzzCity has also come up with an easy-to-use ad system for advertisers to buy and manage ads on its network of WAP sites. The system allows advertisers to define single or multiple campaigns; select start and end dates; manage daily ad spend; select country (or countries) the ads are to appear; target for models and capabilities of handsets; and select channels (types of content) where the ads will be shown.

It also offers special functionalities such as the ability to click through to the advertisers' own WAP

sites, Click-To-Call capability and opt-in surveys. The system allows the advertisers to bid for the price they are willing to pay for the clicks. There is, however, a minimum price of one US cent per click. The higher the bid, the more frequent the ads appear.

There are two significant factors that set BuzzCity apart from its competitors. First, it has its own social networking site called MyGamma, which recently won the Best Mobile Social Networking Service award at the 2008 Mobile World Congress.

MyGamma is targeted at two distinct audiences: the newly connected middle class in developing markets and the blue-collar group in developed regions. The rationale is that these "unwired" consumers' main point of access for the Internet will be through their phones rather than through a PC. By building its own mobile social networking site, BuzzCity has its own content channel to sell ads.

Second, BuzzCity gives mobile publishers the option of charging for their content rather than relying just on display ads for revenue. Examples of premium content that can be charged for are ringtones, games, wallpapers, horoscopes, fortune telling, video clips, MP3 songs and passes to premium information.

In this part of the world, premium content providers find it hard enough getting the necessary infrastructure to sell their stuff online. Imagine how much harder it is to do so on mobile. BuzzCity makes it easy by offering a simple payment interface based on its own currency called Gamma Dollars. Mobile merchants who sign up with this programme will be able to offer premium content for sale to users.

First-time users of this mobile commerce system are required to register for a free Gamma Wallet, which they can load with Gamma Dollars via credit card, WAP payment (offered through local telcos) and premium SMS.

If you are a mobile publisher and you want to monetise your site, you would do well to look at BuzzCity as a means to do so.

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