



# The Cultural Evolution

## TECHNOLOGY: MOBILE PHONES

Scottish firm Mobiqa ties up deal for access to Chinese market

By Julia Fields

IT will give a Scottish business access to a market estimated to be growing by five million people every month.

The market is China – where new mobile phone subscribers are adding to an existing pool that amounts to 400 million people, one fifth of the two billion mobile users on the planet.

The company is Mobiqa, an Edinburgh-based technology outfit, whose chief executive Ian McCready realises the massive potential of the deal he has signed.

Under the distribution and licence agreement, Mobiqa will provide its mobile-phone software

to register hundreds of thousands of people attending conferences and other events.

The contract with TradeDot, a conference and events specialist, will see Mobiqa's mobile barcode tickets offered to 65,000 visitors at Hong Kong's International Travel Expo in June, as well as other events across China.

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Sunday Herald - 29 January 2006

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The same technology was used by people attending an international urban rail snowboarding competition sponsored by Red Bull in Trafalgar Square, London, in November, and has already been used at a number of other concerts and events around the world.

But the China deal is a major step forward for Mobiqa, which is ramping up its global expansion to tap into the rapid adoption of mobile phones in Asia. The company, founded by Ronnie Forbes three years ago, already has distribution deals in India, Thailand, and the Philippines and signed one in Malaysia this month.

Mobiqa charges a low annual licensing fee to its distributors, but takes around 25% royalty of every transaction. Conquering the vast Chinese market could lead to a major boost to its revenues.

Mobiqa recently appointed Keith Russell as business development manager for Asia to help penetrate the region. Russell, a Scot based in Hong Kong, has more than 12 years of senior business and sales experience, 10 of which were in the mobile phone industry. He has worked for companies including Convergys, Kingston-SCL and British Gas.

Russell has already attracted the interest from Macau telecoms operator CTM, which wants to use Mobiqa technology to send casino coupons to ferry passengers disembarking at the China-controlled island.

This kind of expansion, however, does not come cheap. McCready, who joined as chief executive 14 months ago, admits that Mobiqa is currently raising millions of pounds from private investors to fund the hiring of international sales people to work alongside its distributors, as well as the establishment of a permanent office in the US.

Existing investors such as Scottish property businessman Eric Young have agreed to join the funding round, along with senior management and a number of new, unnamed investors.

McCready says the company's fortunes have really taken off in the last year after a slow start. "That's a reflection on the maturity of the market," he explains. "[Founder] Ronnie Woods was ahead of his time. I don't think the market was ready for it before, but that's changed considerably in the last 18 months.

"We've gone from having customers in six countries to 28 countries."

Turnover is expected to rise from £150,000 to more than £500,000 for the year ending June.

McCready says the technology cuts the costs associated with paper tickets but also lets companies track their customers' buying habits.

One of Mobiqa's products includes a photo of the ticket purchaser, which aims to eliminate the problem of touting.

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