

Business

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Upwardly mobile

Cell phone games bring businesses' messages to youth

By BRIAN MESSENGER
STAFF WRITER

Banking on kids' affinity for video games and the rapid rise of mobile phone use, an up-and-coming advertising business with Andover ties is aiming to give big-name brands some high-tech exposure.

Formed in May 2007 as a spin-off of the audio technology company SONI VOX, Advertising-driven Mobile Entertainment has developed video games that young users can play on their cell phones.

By pitching these relatively simple games as vehicles for branding to record companies and other corporations, AdME hopes to position itself at the forefront of what Chief Marketing Officer and Andover resident Christopher Payne-Taylor refers to as the emerging avenue of mobile advertising.

"They're dying to experience this relatively virgin territory," said Payne-Taylor of the businesses using AdME video games as promotional tools. "It really hasn't even started yet. We're at the beginning. We're on the cusp."

Still only a three-man operation, Payne-Taylor said AdME has plans to expand its workforce and build a headquarters, possibly in Andover, within the next year.

Now with financial backing from a Boston-area investment group, Payne-Taylor said the company is negotiating deals with Atlantic Records, a car manufacturer and the producers of a well-known reality television show.

Payne-Taylor said AdME video games offer advertisers a platform to introduce their products to young people.

"I think AdME has the potential to become one of the leading branded content providers for mobile," said Payne-Taylor, pointing to his cell



PAUL BILODEAU/Staff photo

Christopher Payne-Taylor is the chief marketing officer for AdME, which stands for Advertising-driven Mobile Entertainment. AdME creates simple video games that kids play on their mobile phones, and at the same time sells those video games as avenues for branding to record companies and others.

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Christopher Payne-Taylor, of the games created by his company, AdME

phone. "With this you're able to send your message to ultimately what has become command central for anyone ages 13 to 18."

AdME's graphically-simple video games offer companies changeable characters, graphics and music.

"All of the assets could be easily customized," said Payne-Taylor. "These games are what we call 'play while waiting.'"

The company's flagship game, GuitarStar, has just been released on the AT&T Wireless network, a deal

that Payne-Taylor said offers AdME advertisers exposure to between 20 to 30 million users in the United States.

The object of GuitarStar is to press a trigger button whenever moving guitar picks enter the center of the phone's screen, which is marked by cross-hairs. The guitar picks move in accordance with background music.

Another AdME game, DanceLord, allows users to choreograph a character's dance moves by hitting the

various buttons on their cell phones. Both games are very loosely based on the concepts of successful video game titles "Guitar Hero" and "Dance Dance Revolution," according to Payne-Taylor.

"They're chewing on this like candy," said Payne-Taylor of the kids who play AdME games. "We've run focus groups; they just sit there and keep playing. We have to pry the phone out of their fingers. And it's really simple gameplay."

In the future, AdME games will include user-generated content and a "send-a-friend feature" that will allow users to share the video games with their friends, Payne-Taylor said.

Referring to cell phones as "the world's most ubiquitous personal device," Payne-Taylor said, "With this phone, we've got 'em for 10 or 15 minutes, which is really an eternity in standard advertising parlance."