

Guest Column SANJAY KAPOOR

Upward and Mobile

Innovative products promise lots more for Indian users in the near future



Today India has close to 20 crore mobile users and is considered the fastest growing market in the world, surpassing even the monthly additions of

China. Everything seems to be going right for us with a buoyant economy, higher household incomes and a growing youth segment. Even a few years back, a mobile phone was essentially a business tool and a social accessory for the upper echelons of society. But with increasing prosperity, we are witnessing an unparallel adaptability to mobile phones across customer segments.

If we look at the evolution of the usage of a phone, it has come a long way from the days of mere voice calling, when it was first introduced 13 years ago in India. What one can do on the mobile today is tremendous and it is fast becoming a ubiquitous tool for many of us.

Take the fields of infotainment and commerce, which have seen a lot of evolution. Airtel Live, our interactive customer portal, provides a far superior consumer experience with the user interface being more convenient, visually appealing and with a host of features including handset-based rendering, recommendations and ability to rate as well as gift content. In addition, access to the mobile Internet is now opened up. This would be a crucial tool to attract and retain younger and tech-savvy mobile customers.

Our exclusive partnership with Google has resulted in the world's best search engine being available on Airtel. Music runs as a common thread across all segments and

geographies and we are seeing rapidly-growing popularity of mobile music with people listening to music in various forms, on their mobile phones. We have over 65,000 songs across 20 languages that can be accessed. In the near future, mobile users will be able to access music of their own choice and genre on demand anywhere, anytime. They will also be able to create or record their own music albums.

Mobile advertising is another big opportunity. We are looking at customised music and personalised SMS, which will be fun and easy. Another innovative service that



mobile users can expect is SMS2.0, the next generation messaging application. It combines messaging, content and user preference-based advertising in one seamless and non-invasive package.

Also, mobile communities will gain strength with the introduction of mobile instant messaging and chat services. The scope to be in touch and have access to information at the click of a button is now a reality on the mobile phone.

M-commerce is an emerging area of opportunity, particularly in the high-value markets. We tested the waters last year with the launch of PVR mobile ticketing. Today we have a customer base of over 90,000, benefiting from the service (with 75 per cent repeat usage). Similarly, both airline and train ticketing will be increasingly made available to mobile consumers.

Money transfer is slated to be an important offering in the immediate future. We have launched a service which enables our customers to pay any Airtel postpaid mobile bill using the mobile phone. Prepaid top-ups and landline bill payments will also be available shortly. Person-to-person money transfer (from one bank account to another) via the mobile phone will also be an important offering in the mobile space.

In the months to come, innovative products including exclusive handset bundling opportunities, content and distribution innovations and offerings specifically aimed at both rural and high-value markets will be increasingly available in the market.

Finally, I want to underline that innovation isn't simply a matter of coming up with ideas. It lies in the ability to nurture those ideas, make them work, and bring them to market. Whatever the future may hold for all of us, one thing is for certain, that we as a company will continue to lead innovation, ensure richer customer experience, and continue to focus on increasing customer delight and driving a share of the consumers' wallet, rather than a share of telecom revenues.

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