

International Business News

India's Reliance, Universal tie up for 3G music services

AFP, Mumbai
Universal Music on Wednesday said it would launch music services for third-generation (3G) mobile phones in India with telecoms provider Reliance Communications (RCom).

The deal is the first major content agreement that RCom, India's second largest mobile phone operator, has signed since it acquired 3G mobile spectrum earlier this year for a payment of 85.9 billion rupees (1.85 billion dollars).

Indian subscribers will have access to full-track music downloads, video streaming, live concerts and ring tones on 3G mobile phones, when these services are fully operative in the country.

"This is a re-enforcement that Universal music group is open for business," Rob Wells, Universal's senior vice-president for digital services, told reporters in India's financial capital.

RCom, headed by billionaire Anil Ambani, has a customer base of 110 million across India and expects to launch its 3G mobile services late this year or early in 2011.

"We will be aggressive with our (3G) services. We should be able to launch them either late 2010 or early 2011, assuming spectrum is in place," Reliance Communications director Mahesh Prasad said.

Sharp plans to launch 3D smartphone this year

REUTERS, Tokyo
Sharp Corp plans to take on Apple's iPhone by the end of the year, with the international launch of a smartphone featuring a 3D panel that can be viewed without special glasses, a spokeswoman said on Wednesday.

The new phone will also likely have a 3D capable camera, the spokeswoman said. Though Japan's biggest mobile phone maker, Sharp is a small player in global terms and has so far failed to capitalize on rapid growth in the smartphone market.

A previous venture into the segment, the Kin model manufactured for Microsoft, flopped in the United States and was cancelled in June after less than three months.

Sharp unveiled its 3D panel technology, which is only suitable for small screens such as those on mobile phones and portable game consoles, in April.

Mobile electronics that let users view 3D images without special glasses have been around for some time, since people tend to look at the display from a fixed distance and angle on personal devices, making it technologically less difficult to offer a 3D function.



AFP
Japan's Nissan Motor COO, Toshiyuki Shiga introduces the company's luxury mini-van Elgrand, equipped with a 3.5 or 2.5-litre engine in a seven or eight-seat body, at the company's headquarters in Yokohama, suburban Tokyo yesterday. Nissan will put it on the market on August 18.

StanChart says first-half profits advance

AFP, London
British bank Standard Chartered said Wednesday that net profits rose 9.5 percent in the first half of 2010, as bad debts more than halved at the emerging markets group.

Profits after tax climbed to 2.181 billion dollars (1.649 billion euros) in the six months to the end of June, which compared with 1.991 billion dollars in the same part of 2009, the lender said in a results statement.

Loan impairment losses plunged 60 percent to 437 million dollars in the first half, compared with 1.09 billion dollars last time around.

"The challenging credit environment seen in early 2009 has continued to ease, resulting in lower delinquency trends since the second half of 2009 and consequent lower provisions," the group said.

The lender, which derives more than 90 percent of its income from emerging markets, added that pre-tax profits increased to 3.12 billion dollars, up from 2.84 billion, in line with market expectations.

Japan's DoCoMo ties up with publisher to launch e-books

AFP, Tokyo
Japan's top mobile phone operator NTT DoCoMo said Wednesday it would tie up with a major publisher to launch an electronic book service, as it aims to compete with Apple and its hugely popular iPad.

DoCoMo and Dai Nippon Printing (DNP) will also work on eventually developing devices that can read digital literature including novels and manga comics, the two companies said. DNP plans to distribute content from October.

DoCoMo has a solid subscription base, with more than 56.5 million registered users, roughly fifty percent of the market.

Users will be able to access content through an open platform combining DoCoMo's existing content distribution and payment systems with DNP's planned digital bookstores using smartphones, e-book readers and tablet computers, the companies said.

COLUMN

Pharma boom aids tech sales

PINAKI BHATTACHARYA

The pharmaceutical sector in Bangladesh now contributes hugely to the country's economy. The Tk 5,782 crore pharma market here has grown 18.4 percent last year alone, and is also one of the most technology-oriented sectors, particularly in its sales force. The industry has many customers -- patients, corporate hospitals, government and NGOs -- but its relationship with physicians remains its lifeblood; one created, nurtured and expanded by its sales force.

In 1995, when I used to work in Beximco Pharma, the sales force numbered about 200. Now, there are that many manufacturers, and each of the top 10 have sales forces of more than 1,000 in the field. The total number of representatives is now pegged at 50,000 -- nearly triple the number just 10 years ago. That is at least one rep for every practicing physician.

Pharma sales forces use a variety of mobile technologies. As the return on investment in traditional product promotions waned, wireless tech and applications were adopted to integrate information and resources across organisations. Popular Pharmaceuticals Ltd, a manufacturer of insulin, first used these to submitting daily call reports. Gradually it expanded into sales order submission, order processing, electronic approval and access to sales and rep-performance data. It even implemented a rep movement tracker with mobile service provider Robi (then AKTEL).

Mobile devices and applications can provide the "always-on" information, resources and flexibility sales teams need to better target physicians with the greatest prescribing potential, and to transition from simply promoting products to becoming a trusted and valued source of medical and scientific information. The ever-growing numbers of reps today both generate and draw upon vast amounts of market, physician, product, regulatory and scientific data, and do so with the speed and accuracy demanded by this fast-paced, high-stakes industry.

Some of the biggest pharma companies have invested in sales-automation tools and mobile sales supports are gaining in popularity. The industry has turned to mobile tech to boost productivity, cut costs and build competitive advantage. Mobile devices, from cell phones and PDAs to tablet PCs and even iPods (which can manage



AMRAN HOSSAIN
Medical representatives ride a motorcycle to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The number of reps has trebled over the past decade.

messages downloaded as MP3 files) give reps on the road the flexibility to use their time more efficiently while providing better service to their customers.

Personal digital assistants (PDAs) allow reps to do pre-call planning, including research on physician prescribing and preferences, information on prior contact details, and post-call info and enquiries. Some manage email, and documents with a level of ease and flexibility not afforded by a laptop computer.

PDAs are more powerful when a wireless connection is available to allow reps to access and retrieve documents when meet-

ing with a physician. The interaction can be personalised and tailored instantly if the rep can pull documents and details to answer a physician's questions, and even email documents to the doctor's PDA.

The increased memory capability of today's PDAs even allows reps to use animated presentations, video clips and other digital frills. The applications of wireless and mobile tech includes contact management, physician profiling, sales analysis and planning, call reports, competitive analysis, sample tracking, meeting and event management, compensation and incentive tracking, expense

reports and budgeting. Some people say "selling is selling," and that whether you peddle water or widgets makes no difference in the skills and strategies required for success. But pharmaceutical sales and marketing managers will tell you otherwise: The staggering amount of information required to prepare for and carry out a call puts greater demands on mobile solutions than in other industries.

According to a Pace Productivity Report, pharma sales reps spend just 23 percent of their time selling; and most of the rest searching for the information they need to be able to sell. Sales force automation can collect and provide much of the information reps need, but industry experts caution they are "just one spoke in a wheel of capabilities" needed to make the rep an indispensable resource for physicians. Better information-management and remote access, they say, helps reps focus on value-added tasks and provide more personalised service.

To gain the respect and loyalty of physicians, reps must strive to become educators and consultants armed with information tailored specifically each physician's needs, helping them improve their practices and patient care. Technology -- mobile and otherwise -- augments reps' efforts to build richer relationships with doctors. In the past decade, the industry increased sales force spending by nearly \$500 million each year -- not including free samples of more than \$700 million, while maximising promotional return on investment.

But rapid expansion of sales forces was a cost that made sense only as long as sales continued to rise. The top 20 companies, accounting for 84 percent of the national market, doubled the sizes of their sales forces in five years while prescribing increased only 50 percent. That ballooning of sales-force costs amid more modest sales gains makes efficiency critical for future profitability.

If current trends persist, this competitive market will now favour those who only invest in new technologies that truly drive productivity. Wringing more value out of existing systems and integrating resources across the organisation will be crucial to elevating pharma relationships with doctors.

The writer is a physician and pharmaceutical entrepreneur.

DEVELOPMENT

Millions of Japanese trapped in 'hidden poverty'

AFP, Tokyo

Consumer gluttony, astronomic real-estate prices and jobs for life were once normal in Japan -- but today the country also has millions of poor people desperately struggling to make ends meet.

Two decades after Japan's wealth bubble popped, its citizens have got used to higher unemployment and homeless people sleeping in the streets. Statistics released for the first time last year held yet another surprise.

Nearly one in six Japanese lives below the poverty line -- meaning they earn less than half the median household income, or less than 1,830 dollars for a four-person family -- in a country that prides itself on its egalitarianism.

Many of the worst-off are single mothers, the elderly, and people who lost their jobs in the latest recession, the worst since World War II.

Swelling their ranks has been a new generation of workers who lack the job security their parents enjoyed during Japan's "miracle" growth years from the 1960s onward and through the go-go wealth era of the 1980s and early 90s.

Temporary and part-time jobs and short-term contracts have become the norm for half of all employees under 39 years of age, a group dubbed "Freeters" -- made up of the words "freelancer" and "Arbeiter", German for worker.

"There is a generation gap between those who were hired up until the 90s on permanent contracts and those who entered the job market later," said David-Antoine Malinas, a social scientist at the Maison Franco-Japonaise Tokyo.

These employees are often paid less, and are more vulnerable to job market swings during downturns than permanent staff. Hundreds of thousands of temporary workers were laid off during the recession of 2008-2009.

"I worked for 20 years as a temporary employee at a branch office of a large company before losing my job in March 2009," said one middle-aged man, a member of the new poor at an anti-poverty meeting organised in Tokyo.

"I lived in the company's dormitory and was kicked out one month after I was laid off," he said, adding that since then he had had to occasionally sleep rough in public places, making it much harder to find a new job.

Many on the brink of poverty fall over the edge because of the demise of family structures that once acted as a safety net, said Aya Abe, a researcher at the National Institute on Population and Social Security.

In the past, three generations often lived under one roof, meaning that up to four people -- the parents and grandparents -- could work and pool their wages, which limited the shock of one person losing their job.

Today "many single mothers juggle two jobs," said Abe. "They work in the daytime, then cook dinner for their children before heading off to their second job. They return home around 3:00 am to sleep before a new day begins."

It is now often the elderly -- whose proportion in society is on the rise in rapidly greying Japan, with its low birthrate and high life expectancy -- who pay the heaviest price as poverty grows in Asia's biggest economy.

The role of the company and the family have diminished in people's lives, but the government has failed to fill the void, say experts.

"For the past 20 years, taxes and social security contributions have risen," to the detriment of the poor who have seen little in return, said Abe.

OECD data shows that the government in Japan actually worsens child poverty because it demands more money from low-income families in taxes than it gives them back in benefits -- a situation unique in the developed world.

Social mores dictate that almost no-one begs in Japan, and crime rates are low, but Abe said there is nonetheless widespread "hidden poverty", where people may, for example, skip a meal just to save money.

"I don't turn on the lights and don't use heat or air conditioning in order to save electricity costs," said one student living on a scholarship in Tokyo, who said he had spent nothing on leisure and bought no clothes for a year.

The Japanese public only became aware of the country's rising poverty in the mid-2000s, a trend many commentators blamed on the neoliberal pro-market reforms under conservative former prime minister Junichiro Koizumi.

"The public became aware after (public broadcaster) NHK first introduced the term 'working poor' in their report, which was



AFP
A pedestrian looks at a man eating lunch sitting on cardboard on a street in Tokyo. Consumer gluttony, astronomic real-estate prices and jobs for life were once normal in Japan -- but today the country also has millions of poor people desperately struggling to make ends meet.

followed by the Lehman shock," said Makoto Yuasa, head of the non-profit group Link Association.

Yuasa was the organiser of a tent village of irregular workers who had lost their jobs that arose in the winter of 2008-09 in a park on the edge of Tokyo's government district.

The event stunned many in Japan and

helped change official attitudes about the right of everyone -- not just the elderly and disabled, but also young people -- to "seikatsuhogo", or state social benefits.

When the centre-left Democratic Party of Japan took power last year, it recruited Yuasa as an adviser, leading to the establishment of "one stop service" facilities for the unemployed during his six-month stint.