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Ads going mobile

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Meena Thiruvengadam
Express-News Business Writer

The power to beam Scottie around is no longer just the stuff of TV.

Nowadays, if the makers of Star Trek wanted to, they could beam Scottie — OK, a video or image of Scottie — straight to your mobile phone.

As an increasing number of people opt for Bluetooth-enabled cell phones, advertising agencies and billboard operators are teaming up to provide content that will stick with consumers far longer than the average 30-second TV spot.

It's just one form of advertising within the growing sphere of mobile marketing.

Through a billboard, bus stop bench or airport sign, a company provides passers-by the option to download content to his or her mobile phone. Along with that wallpaper, video or mp3 comes a little something to remind you of the brand that brought it to you.

Used more extensively in Australia, Asia and Europe, Bluetooth marketing has yet to take off in the U.S. But Clear Channel Outdoor is hoping to change that with the installation of 1,000 Bluetooth-enabled ad sites across the U.S. in the next year.



(Mark Fisher/ Express-News)

Bluetooth was named after Harald Bluetooth Gormson — a 10th-century Danish king who unified the Danes and the Norwegians, according to Bluetooth.com. Bluetooth uses short-range radio frequency to "unify" information from different technologies, such as wirelessly connecting a laptop to a cell phone.

Clear Channel is partnering with New York-based mobile content distributor Qwikker on the Bluetooth advertising effort. The pair already has 100 sites in operation across the country, Qwikker founder Saul Kato said.

"We're just literally putting our big toe in the water," said Michael Hudes, global director of digital media for Clear Channel Outdoor. Clear Channel Outdoor is the advertising business unit of San Antonio-based Clear Channel Communications Inc. "But we think we can create a rich brand experience for our advertisers and for consumers."

Here's how it works: When you've got the Bluetooth function on your phone turned on and you walk by

On The Web:

www.clearchanneloutdoor.com

a Bluetooth-enabled ad, you'll be asked if you'd like to download free content from the ad.

"Our system is intelligent enough so that if you do nothing a number of times, it will eventually quit reaching out to you," Hudes said.

Accept, and you'll receive a music video, wallpaper, video clip or whatever content an advertiser thinks will resonate with consumers.

Short video clips and music videos are the most popular content download options, Qwikker's Kato said. "You have to have something that people want."

The U.S. Navy last fall used Bluetooth advertising to encourage sailors to enlist in the reserves at the completion of their active-duty service. The ad campaign offered downloads of two-minute videos from pay phone kiosks at about a dozen naval bases.

Early this year, Pepsi offered music video downloads to consumers in six cities to promote its short-lived WB series Pepsi Smash. The campaign, created in conjunction with Qwikker, was billed as the largest ever Bluetooth marketing campaign in the U.S.

But of the 159,045 cellular users offered Bluetooth ad content during the eight-week Pepsi campaign, fewer than 10 percent accepted.

Pepsi declined an interview for this article, calling the Bluetooth campaign "a test."

Still, as the number of Bluetooth-equipped phones sold around the world grows, Qwikker's Kato is betting that interest in mobile marketing campaigns also will grow.

Worldwide sales of Bluetooth phones are expected to approach 1.3 billion by 2011, according to the research and advisory firm Gartner Inc.

meenat@express-news.net