

Multiplayer Mobile Gaming

Mobile gaming is all set to reach new heights, thanks to the launch of its multiplayer mobile variants. Gaming addicts in India can now look forward to an international gaming experience through offerings from CanvasM.



You've met up with friends at the club, in a disco and in a park. Now, how about meeting up in a virtual game room? Yes, you read that right. In a tech world, driven by Web 2.0 innovations, CanvasM—a joint venture of Tech Mahindra (erstwhile Mahindra British Telecom) and Motorola—has launched multiplayer mobile gaming that promises to race ahead as the next killer application. It has immense potential as a social networking and community-building tool.

This is a win-win scenario for everyone involved—providers as well as users. Solution providers such as CanvasM, who will launch the service with one operator in the next few weeks while already in discussion with three other operators, have everything to gain from tapping a huge market. Apparently, the Indian mobile gaming market is currently estimated at \$15 million, and is poised to grow to a staggering \$336 million by 2009 (ITFacts).

A service that targets the youth

The stakes are particularly high because in non-metro areas, the mobile is slowly becoming the dominant access medium for content, due to the lack of alternate avenues. It may seem hard to believe, but more than 70 per cent of gaming-related downloads are done in Bihar, Orissa, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Kerala. This trend is pushing the demand for games in regional languages, thus opening another niche sector for content developers of innovative value-added services.

As most of these downloads are made by the youth, multiplayer mobile gaming could emerge as a sure-shot way to target young consumers and convert them into a loyal client base that generates a constant revenue stream.

The games, per se, are packaged so as to include a wide range of features. As such, the CanvasM solution enables multiple channels of communication

and social networking between users through buddy lists, contests and tournaments, blogging, chatting, sharing images, user profiling, etc. Some of these rich features, such as the comprehensive tournament capabilities are of equal appeal to the operators, as they facilitate specific promotions and events.

Feature-rich solution

Interestingly, the solution provides a seamless experience to consumers over the mobile as well as the PC—it offers multi-modal game play. Jagdish Mitra, CEO, CanvasM opines, "This feature will benefit telecom companies since besides presenting an easy way to build a cross-media community, this cross-media game play ensures that the core features and functions that contributed to the success of Internet gaming, migrate to the multiplayer mobile gaming space." Some of these features and functions are the display of high score lists and player profiles, the creation of public and private game rooms, and the ability to challenge players and chat during games. Other benefits for operators include an additional revenue channel, a brand-promotion tool, and a community-building tool (especially around different games), all of which lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The fact that the technology is agnostic to network and device, and can be played simply using a mobile with GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) connectivity, or on a PC with Internet access, will eventually enhance its adoption across consumer segments.

The technology itself is based on a platform that allows multiple players to access the offerings that are mostly multi-user games. Built-in sessions and controls enable turn-by-turn play, so once players complete their play, the next player comes on while all the others are blocked, leaving no room for foul play! Users will also be able

to avail context-sensitive help, a quick three-click game start with the option of choosing from a catalogue of classic and online hits from top online games portals. The game also proceeds rapidly due to the incorporation of light-weight clients.

A potpourri of offerings

While popular multiplayer games in the global market include Second Life, Space Wars, the World series of Poker, 3D Pool Hall, Micro Spin Racer, Puzzle Bobble, Black Jack, Sudoku, Jelly Pop, Backgammon, Reversi, Shuffleboard, Snake, Dominoes, Spades and Chess, CanvasM will be launching its services with a selection from these. With the variety of games, a flexible business model will also offer consumers a choice of plans.

Mitra elucidates these options as follows: a one-time purchase pay (a one-time payment for unlimited play); time-defined pay (meaning the purchase of authorisation for the use of a game for a defined time period); usage-defined pay (the purchase of an authorisation for use of the game for either a set time, or a set number of sessions); subscription pay (paying a monthly recurring charge for access to content); multi-pack purchase (authorisation for use of a number of products for an unlimited or time-defined period); free trials (authorisation for access to a product for a set time or number of gaming



Display of high score lists and player profiles, the creation of public and private game rooms, and the ability to challenge players and chat during games are some of the features and functions that multiplayer mobile gaming offers

sessions); and pay-for-play, implying the purchase of authorisation for a single gaming session.

No hurdles from the telecom sector

Since the markets are so obviously eager and waiting, the only factor that could stand in the way of multiplayer mobile gaming becoming the next big mobile service is the readiness of telecom operators. In this regard, Mitra opines that the Who's Who of global network operators have already launched such gaming. These include Cingular, Sprint, Vodafone, Singtel, Orange, T-Mobile, O2, amp'd mobile, Verizon,

Telefonica, Alltel, Hutch, Nextel, 3, Amena, Etisalat and SK Telecom.

For this reason, and in view of the solutions' rapid integration with the operator network, as well as the possibility of flexible business models to suit both operators and consumers, its service delivery capabilities and the ease of integrating third party developments (the deployment of new innovative games), Mitra believes that Indian telecom operators will also rapidly embrace this new value-added service. For all we know, multiplayer mobile gaming may well turn out to be the next money-spinner for Indian tech gaming companies. **IT**

Multiplayer mobile gaming could emerge as a sure-shot way to target young consumers, and convert them into a loyal client base that generates a constant revenue stream.