

Pay per eyeball

MOBILE ADVERTISING START-UP Eyeballs Mobile, which launched this month, is interesting – for three reasons. First, research house BMI-TechKnowledge recently forecast that South Africa's mobile advertising market would grow to between R1,3bn and R2,15bn, with the most likely scenario being a R1,7bn market by 2012. Eyeballs believes it has a technologically advanced and relatively unique proposition in that market.

Second, AltX-listed company Huge Group bought a 25% stake in March and was seen brimming with excitement at the prospects for the business. It has the option of increasing that to 40% over the next two years.

Third, aside from the prospects for the industry generally – and Huge's keen involvement – the start-up is chaired by former managing executive for brand and advertising at Vodacom, André Beyers.

Beyers began his own consultancy after leaving Vodacom

but became involved with Eyeballs earlier this year. He's now spending roughly 80% of his time at the business. The level of commitment from a man of his calibre in itself suggests he sees huge potential, although Beyers is quick to point out the company is taking things one step at a time. But make no mistake it does indeed have global aspirations.

Eyeballs launched this month in a low key manner, opening its website to registrations. However, it goes to market soon with an advertising campaign that will be mostly below the line but will also include some radio advertising. It hopes to attract 50 000 registered users in the first month or two.

Beyers says many brands are experimenting as to how to create a groundswell around a particular product without spending a lot of money. "It's all about carefully picking where you'll influence and allowing the message to seed itself."



Clearly excited about potential.
André Beyers

Eyeballs offers content-rich but relatively unobtrusive advertising over your cellphone on an opt-in basis. Clients must register and provide details about themselves in order for Eyeballs to tailor the right advertising content to them – making it a dream for advertisers. They pay once they reach an agreed threshold of views and know exactly to whom they're talking.

And, in exchange to agreeing to view the content, subscribers get paid back 2c/view (could be increased, depending on the take-up), which they can exchange for rewards such as pre-paid airtime and Mxit Moola. Beyers says it's working on adding others,

such as a charity and an environmental initiative. He says its success hinges on having a compelling rewards mechanism and access to the right handsets.

Eyeballs currently supports all Symbian-compatible handsets, as most smart-phones are Symbian-based and offer a secure environment. But it's also writing code for other handsets, says Beyers.

Eyeballs already has advertising support from at least 14 major brands, including Toyota, FNB, MultiChoice, Santam, Spur and Nokia.

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