

## Cell phone conference dials up the future

Next generation of communication poised to inspire, motivate

By Suzanne Bohan, STAFF WRITER

Article Last Updated: 02/20/2007 02:41:02 AM PST

SEBASTIEN TANGUAY, general manager of MyFoodPhone, can't wait for the U.S. cellular network to exit its primitive condition — relatively speaking — in mobile communication.

When more cell phone companies begin installing high-speed data networks this year, Tanguay said, pioneering firms like his will move swiftly to offer novel strategies using cell phone video and photos to promote health, physical activity and even provide cellular video consultations with a doctor.

"These high-stream networks are already deployed in Europe," Tanguay explained. "Here in North America, it's kind of the Stone Age of mobile telephony. We're a little behind Europe and way behind Asia."

Earlier this month, Tanguay joined 250 other mobile communication visionaries at a first-of-its-kind conference held at Stanford University.

One key subject addressed at the conference was how mobile communication, to a degree television and computers can't match, can be harnessed to inspire healthier habits.

"Take the single issue of weight management," said BJ Fogg, director of the Persuasive Technology Lab at Stanford and an organizer of the event. "As soon as someone figures out how to change behavior so people lose weight, imagine how huge that will be," he said.

Focus on the positive

But cell phone communication, by its more personal nature, will work to influence behavior not through unwelcome commercials or pop-up ads, but through positive persuasion, Fogg emphasized.

"It's not going to persuade you by disturbing and annoying you by pushing ads in your face," he said. "It will be more aligned with your personal goals."

In the coming decade, Fogg predicted, cell phones will become the dominant platform for influencing people's behavior and attitudes, outstripping the position now held by TV.

"They're little computers we carry with us," said Fogg, an experimental psychologist. "When we don't have them by our sides, we feel lost."

"And they're going to get even more influential in our lives," he continued. "(Mobile communication) extends our power in a way nothing else can," Fogg said.

## Health promotion

MyFoodPhone is among a handful of companies offering cellular-based health promotion services which are poised to rapidly expand in the United States, including BeWell Mobile, Qualcomm, Intel and Sensei, which is partially owned by health care giant Humana. All the firms sent representatives to speak to the Stanford conference.

These companies recently began offering, or will soon offer, programs to use cell phones to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, motivate people to walk more, or create mobile strategies for weight management, among other services.

It's a burgeoning niche in the wireless market.

In a September 2006 report from FDA News called "Wireless Medical Technologies,"

experts predicted that the market for wireless medical technology will start to "blaze skyward," growing to a \$7 billion yearly market in five years, or a 58percent annual growth rate.

In a testament to the exploding interest in the field, the Stanford conference, held Feb. 3 and called "Mobile Persuasion," sold out at \$395 a ticket for the one-day event. But when organizers offered the same conference two years earlier, plans to hold it were scrapped due to a lack of interest.

"Something has shifted dramatically," said Fogg, the event organizer.

As an example of the power of persuasion that cell phones can provide, Fogg cited a pilot project under way at Intel that uses cell phones to promote physical activity.

Ian Smith, a senior staff researcher with Intel who spoke at the conference, said the cell phones "reward" people for performing physical activity by changing the background image on their cell phone during a weekly cycle.

At the start of the week, the image shows a flat green field. But as the user exercises or walks about, a small monitoring device attached to the user that measures physical activity automatically communicates with a cell phone.

As a record of activity accumulates, flowers pop up on the cell phone screen. For example, a blue daisy represents a strength training workout, a sunflower a walking session and a butterfly signals the achievement of the weekly goal.

No more 'nagware'

"There's a fairly strong basis from literature that these positive motivators are much more effective than 'nagware,'" Smith said, referring to a program that "hassles you if you haven't been to the gym three times a week."

The data then can be stored and analyzed, providing a more realistic assessment of a person's activity, which often is overestimated in personal recollections, Smith said.

Business at MyFoodPhone, which was launched in May and charges \$9.95 a month, is growing, Tanguay said.

"We're doing pretty well, in the thousands of users," he said.

The company's service provides a modern twist on the established advice to dieters and others monitoring their eating habits — keep a daily log of what you consume.

But most people quickly abandon the cumbersome job, and also underestimate what they eat, said Tanguay.

## Logging meals the easy way

Recognizing that, MyFoodPhone developed a system in which its subscribers click pictures of the meals and snacks they eat during the day with their cell phone cameras. Clients then send the photos to a central database, where a nutritionist analyzes the pictures, and twice a month provides feedback on how well or poorly a client's food choices and portion sizes are serving his or her health and weight objectives.

When U.S. cellular networks can support it, Tanguay's firm also plans to launch a new division offering video visits with a doctor via a cell phone, providing what he called "a doctor in your pocket."

Tanguay said they'll likely hire staff physicians, who will consult with subscribers to provide advice and prescriptions for "minor ailments." The service, he added, could be a boon to those with limited access to a doctor, or those who have recently moved.

Contact Suzanne Bohan at [sbohan@angnewspapers.com](mailto:sbohan@angnewspapers.com) or (650) 348-4324.

In April, San Francisco became the first city nationwide to employ text messaging with cell phones to steer teenagers away from risky sexual behavior and to provide referrals for free health care and counseling, said Cetum O'Brien, a youth counselor with the San Francisco Public Health Department, which administers the program.

Deb Levine, executive director of Internet Sexuality Information Services in Oakland, whose firm developed the text messaging system, called SexInfo, described the program at the Stanford conference.

Teens, Levine pointed out, constantly use text messaging. "They're all walking down the street, thumbing their cell phones," she said.

When she and public health officials met with a focus group of San Francisco teens and asked if text messaging about preventing STDs would reach youth, "They looked at us and said, 'Duh, of course. That's a great way to get us our information,'" Levine recalled.

The first six months after the project launched in April, advertised through posters and word of mouth, the service received more than 4,500 inquiries, she said.

Fogg, with Stanford, said there's a "huge demand" for mobile communication services about health and other topics.

While Fogg said many of the businesses entering the field are still working out how the technology will generate revenue, there are fortunes to be made.

"The business models are not yet clear," he said. "But definitely there will be a lot of money to be made in mobile persuasion and mobile health."

Contact Suzanne Bohan at [sbohan@angnewspapers.com](mailto:sbohan@angnewspapers.com) or (650) 348-4324.