

Technology



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Firm makes mobile websites easy

Waterford firm's Zinadoo service allows users to create, manage and promote their own mobile website, writes Karlin Lillington

A new Waterford-based company is to offer free online tools that will allow organisations and individuals to create websites for mobiles and offer a range of text services to subscribers.

Nubiq, an Enterprise Ireland-funded spin-off company from the Centre for Converged Communications Services (3CS) at the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) launched its first product, a mobile service called Zinadoo, at www.zinadoo.com, this week.

According to chief executive Helene Haughney, Zinadoo provides a service that enables end users to create their own mobile website from their computer.

People can use Zinadoo to create a mini-website that will display on a mobile phone, and can then add text services that friends, members or customers can subscribe to by visiting the mobile website, or by going to a regular website. To create a site

and set up text services, users go to the Zinadoo.com website and fill in a set of forms and click on the services they wish to add to their mobile or internet site.

The company says users don't have to write software, develop and manage connections to operator's networks and gateways, or host, manage or monitor the service.

Once they've set up their site, users can create their own text services to promote their site, and to build community activities through text-based polls, announcements, news alerts and competitions.

"The key to this product is that it is simple to use and non-technical. You don't need IT (information technology) development ability or need to contact a mobile operator," says Haughney.

Users already experimenting with the service include Eire Og Carlow GAA Club, the Waterford Golf Club, a tag rugby team – and a Nubiq staff member, who has

been using it to organise friends and family for his wedding.

Haughney says individuals, athletic clubs, community groups, and small to medium-sized businesses could use the service to keep in touch with friends, family, members and customers.

Waterford Golf Club is using the service on its website – www.waterfordgolfclub.com – to enable people to receive alerts, special event notifications and news updates, and also to query whether the course is open.

While the last use may seem mundane, it is proving a blessing for golf course employees, says Haughney.

"The golf club had lots of people phoning at 7am asking whether the course was open and playable. Now, people can text for information on whether the greens are open as that information is made available first thing each morning. They get a text back right away with the information on the course. That frees staff up from having to take

dozens of calls on a simple question," she says.

Nubiq will allow Irish organisations and individuals to use the service for free from the Zinadoo website starting this month, coinciding with the launch of Nubiq itself. The company wants to get real user feedback in the Irish market and Haughney says it is easier to do this if the company offers the service directly to people for now, rather than try to partner with an operator.

"Anyone in Ireland can go to the website and create their own mobile website for free, and add on services," she says. Users pay the normal operator costs for sending texts.

She says the company is also running trials with Zinadoo in Spain and Greece under the EU-funded eTen market validation programme. Nubiq's partners include AePONA (UK), Aceno (Ireland), Fraunhofer Institute FOKUS (Germany), OTEPlus (Greece) and Telefonica I&D (Spain).

"As the product takes off, we hope to partner with operators in different markets," says Haughney.

Either Nubiq would license the Zinadoo software to operators, allowing them to offer the service to customers themselves, or Nubiq could function as an application service provider (ASP) for operators.

"We'd host and 'white label' it (offer it under an operator's brand name)," using a revenue share model for generating income," she says.

Zinadoo started two years ago as a "proof of concept" project for a programme at Enterprise Ireland, says Haughney. Engineers within WIT's Telecommunication Software and Systems Group (TSSG), which is associated with 3CS, had come up with a basic idea for creating mobile websites and the idea was gradually refined as trial users came back with comments.

The text services angle came about because once people had

created their mobile website, they wanted an easy way to tell people it was there. Haughney notes that while Zinadoo is currently running an SMS service, it also will support iMode and MMS.

The European market with its love of SMS and mobiles is an obvious initial market, but Haughney says Nubiq is also eyeing up the North American market.

"We plan to focus on Europe, but we are engaging with Enterprise Ireland in the US. The text market is not that large there, but it is growing. It would be interesting for us to see if there's space for us."

Haughney worked for Irish telecommunications company Aldiscon and then for Logica after it purchased Aldiscon, and moved on to have her own consultancy. She joined 3CS and, as the mobile website project began to firm up into an actual service for a potential market, came on board as chief executive.

"I was actually very interested in setting up my own company and doing technology transfer, so this fit really well," she says.

In addition to Zinadoo, 3CS has 12 other active research projects and employs 40 full-time researchers in converged services research and development.

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