

Mobile Games analyst

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predicts – if that point hasn't been reached already.

As yet, however, few mobile games companies could claim to have brand-name recognition among the mass market.

Where there is brand-name recognition, it is usually of the brand itself, rather than the games companies. These branded games are often ports from PC or console games, developed around licensed properties, such as movies or TV series, or based on sports franchises.

Brand association has helped introduce mobile users to games, but some branded titles have been of poor quality, discouraging repeat purchasing. That hurts the revenues of cellcos, which remain the main distribution channel for mobile games, and damages the brand.

The move by games companies toward building consumer awareness should help improve quality, since such companies will not want to associate their brand with poor-quality titles.

Building a consumer brand can also help a games company maximize its revenues in a growing market.

Digital Bridges has already started consumer advertising in the UK and Germany, with campaigns to follow in Spain, France and the U.S., Maglione says. The advertising will promote Digital Bridges' games and its consumer-facing web site – which the company launched in July under the dbigames brand – through print media, including mainstream, lifestyle and trade press.

Since Digital Bridges started tacking its web site onto its consumer advertising in September, traffic to the site has doubled, says Maglione. The company does not yet sell games directly to consumers from the site, instead directing visitors to its retail distribution partners, which include mobile content portals and UK satellite TV broadcaster Sky. Major retailers in EMEA, North America and South Africa are also selling Digital Bridges games packs, under the dbi Mobile Entertainment brand.

HandyGames is also conducting promotional campaigns, including running competitions and putting its games up for review. But Kassulke says it is difficult to run widespread advertising campaigns because the mobile games industry is still in its infancy.

Even so, Kassulke says it is better for games companies to build consumer brands now, rather than later. He says it's also better for games companies to be prepared with the kind of marketing material cellcos or content portals can use in campaigns – such as artwork for print ads, TV spots and posters, and collateral, such as ring tones and wallpapers.

Meanwhile, the strategy of relying on well-known brands has already helped games companies such as Living Mobile and Digital Bridges build their profiles among consumers.

"When we started in the market, we did not think that we wanted to have a consumer brand, but a B2B brand," says Thomas Garanin, Living Mobile's managing director. Garanin says he believes the company has established a good reputation among operators and portals, chiefly through its ports of well-known games from Japan-headquartered games-publishing giants Hudson Soft and Capcom.

"But we think we have reached a new stage in the market, and this is something we have to think about," Garanin says. "Do we have to establish our brand? Is it possible to es-

tablish a brand? Or should we focus on our brands?"

As such, Living Mobile plans to continue focusing mainly on promoting its licensed brands, while taking baby steps into building its own brand among consumers.

At the same time, Living Mobile says it will start using the association with *Bomberman* to begin building its own brand in the consumer market.

Digital Bridges has also adopted that tactic, co-marketing some of its titles with its brand partners, including console-game publisher Codemasters' *Colin McRae Rally*. The title is promoted on a page in the manual for the car featured in the game, such as the Subaru Impreza WRX.

"It is very much associating our publisher name with games, so that when we launch a game which does not have a brand – like *3D Pool* – people will then try it and play it because it comes from a quality publishing house," says Maglione. He adds that the company believes the strategy has worked, since *3D Pool* is selling well.

Living Mobile is adding splash screens at the beginning of its games, has relaunched its web site and plans to use end-user marketing in 2005.

"But this is not something we are focused on," Garanin says. "We would rather spend the money on [developing] the product."

Garanin adds that there is a third, much riskier way mobile games companies can build greater consumer awareness, and that is to build their own IP.

Building a consumer brand in this way is a lengthy and expensive process, even assuming that the game itself is innovative and of high quality. The games company is responsible for ensuring that the game is accepted by a number of distribution channels and is adequately promoted.

Further, while developing a series of games under the same brand can add momentum, doing so takes time. "We have not really seen it so far," says Garanin. "The market is still too young to really show a true mobile brand which originates from the mobile market and has no relationship to cinema, sports or console games."

But Andresen says Elkwere has no intention of trying to build its brand awareness among consumers, preferring to focus exclusively on the B2B market. It does enable consumers to purchase mobile games from its web site, but it has no plans to publicize the capability.

There are already too many companies in the market selling mobile games to the consumer, says Andresen, including content portals such as Jamba! and Zed, which already have good brand recognition – and might not appreciate competition from games companies.

But most games companies have worked out a compromise: establishing a consumer-facing web presence, which provides information about the games available and then directs the visitor toward the operator portals to purchase their games.

Others, including UK developer Morpheme, Namco America and Sega Mobile, also sell games from their web sites, enabled by commerce platforms from companies such as Netherlands-based Sharewire.net, UK-based Bango.net and U.S. company Handango.

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