■ iTV

Celador targets P2P wagering

TV-production company Celador International is planning a global rollout of a multiplayer mobile game based on its popular *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?* format, which in some territories will enable players to compete with each other by wagering real money.

In territories where real-money betting is illegal or unfeasible, players will compete for points instead.

Simon Gunning, head of interactive media at Celador International, says the P2P betting model could be used for other mobile applications.

"We're very interested in using those general principles of peer-to-peer wagering to develop formats for other services and brands in territories around the world," Gunning says. "We see that as being a fantastically profitable area for us over the next couple of years, especially on mobile."

Celador would also like to enable cross-platform gaming, which would enable mobile users to compete against people playing on their TVs via digital TV settop boxes. According to Gunning, the business logistics will be more complex than the technical issues in making it happen.

"You're dealing with lots of different partners, so getting everybody to work together and then dividing the money is quite hard," Gunning says. "But we can manage that process, and in CMate we have got a good partner to deal with the technical side."

Developed by Israel-based multiplayer-platform-provider CMate, multiplayer *Millionaire* launched on Israeli operator Cellcom in 4Q04. Celador and CMate plan for the game to go live with the other two Israeli cellcos, Orange and Pelephone, before rolling it out to other territories.

Meanwhile, the single-player *Millionaire* Java game, developed by Macrospace, has topped the mobile game charts in every country in which it has been released, Gunning says.

■ publishing

THQ, Jamdat set sights on China

U.S.-headquartered mobile-games-publishing rivals THQ Wireless and Jamdat Mobile, which have both recently invested in China-based mobile content distributor C-Valley, have revealed that they will take markedly different approaches to the Chinese market.

While branded mobile games will be the key for THQW in making inroads into China, according to THQW President Tim Walsh, Jamdat says it plans to place equal emphasis on branded and nonbranded games.

C-Valley will port and localize THQW's mobile games and content, chiefly globally recognized brands such as *Star Wars* and *MotoGP*, with sports brands a particular focus in the buildup to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

By contrast, Jamdat plans to push both branded and nonbranded games, such as *Jamdat Bowling*, in China from day one.

"The fact that C-Valley already has these established relationships with carriers means you don't need to go in with a well-known brand to gain credibility for yourself," maintains Tom Ellsworth, executive vice president of marketing at Jamdat.

Partnering with a Chinese distributor is a logical move for both publishers. "The Chinese market is very complicated, with many rules and regulations that prevent foreign companies from doing business," says C-Valley spokeswoman Catherine Wu.

THQW and Jamdat both chose to invest in and work with C-Valley because of its strong relationships with China Mobile and China Unicom and its links with regional handset manufacturers and retailers.

Mobile games revenues are still limited in China (*MGA*, 15 Oct, 2004), but Walsh says that now is the time for new entrants to set themselves up in the market. "We see Java and other applications getting ready to take off," he says.

THQW plans to further expand its Chinese operations and start developing content there for the domestic market. Ultimately, it aims to acquire Chinese games that could become crossover hits in Europe and the U.S., Walsh says.

Ellsworth is more cautious but admits that acquiring local content is a possibility.

Both companies claim that their simultaneous investment is an asset. THQW and Jamdat have followed the lead of Japan-headquartered publishers Square Enix, Namco, Taito and Sega in taking something akin to a partnership route into China

■ gambling

OTA security critical for m-gambling

Mobile gambling services require more security features than their Internet equivalents if they are to gain players' trust, says Francine Haliva, a spokeswoman for mobile casino provider Spin3, speaking at mformobile's Mobile Gambling Summit in London recently.

"Most mobile gambling companies store sensitive information on their gaming servers," Haliva said. "But there is still an area that is cause for concern among players: the over-the-air communication between those servers and the player's mobile device."

She added that the nascent mobile gambling market also needs to address a number of regulatory issues, including age verification. But based on the experience of online gaming, these issues are not likely to hamper the growth of mobile gambling.

Spin3 recently signed up the first customer for its GameWire mobile casino system: UK bookmaker Ladbrokes. Ladbrokes will offer three of Spin3's mobile games via its web site and also a Spin3-customized J2ME version of the *Ladbrokes Balls* game that is live on 3 UK's 3G network.

GameWire is a white-labeled service that includes Spin3's patent-pending OTA authentication technology, Spin-Loc, and six games.

Newsbytes

Brand owners seek long-term deals with games publishers
Studios that have decided not to directly involve themselves in mobile games publishing are realizing that they need to develop long-term partnerships with one or two players, says Greg Ballard, CEO of U.S. publisher **Sorrent**.

Sorrent itself recently signed a two-year agreement with **Twentieth Century Fox**, giving the publisher exclusive rights to produce mobile games and content based on a dozen of Fox's upcoming movies. Ballard says Sorrent chose the films, which include *Kingdom of Heaven, Robots* and *Ice Age 2: The Meltdown*.

Sorrent will also have first option on other Fox movies during the course of the deal, according to Ballard. "We would be the clear front-runner for those and have certain rights to them, unless we decided not to pursue it," he says.

The publisher is extremely unlikely to work with other movie studios in the near future, Ballard says, not least because the Fox deal has brought welcome stability to Sorrent's release schedule.

"We have a good chunk of our 2005 and 2006 product road map done now," Ballard says. "It makes a huge difference in terms of planning the business to know that 20% of your road map is already in place."