

These articles are more than just news. They examine the significance of events, providing real strategic insight.

■ publishing

In-Fusio unveils EGE Lite, buys Thumbworks, Mobile

France-based mobile games publisher In-Fusio plans to unveil EGE Lite, a scaled-down version of its ExEn Gaming Extensions engine, at the 3GSM industry trade show in Cannes, France, this month.

EGE Lite is intended to complement EGE and retains many EGE features, says In-Fusio co-CEO Giles Corbett. But EGE Lite excludes those capabilities that require deep integration with handset operating systems, such as a vectorized graphics engine for 3D gaming and digital rights management.

The result is a product that, at 100KB, is one-quarter the size of EGE and can therefore be downloaded over the air to a device – for example, as part of a cellco's games offering – or installed at the end of a production line into handsets that don't have enough memory to run the 400KB EGE.

EGE Lite could help In-Fusio vastly increase its ExEn gaming business, which has required handset manufacturers – which have mostly been smaller vendors – to embed the com-

pany's ExEn and EGE gaming engines into their devices to enable mobile users to play ExEn games.

But a deal In-Fusio signed with Orange last year (*MGA*, 6 Aug, 2004) will also see EGE embedded into devices rolled out by larger handset manufacturers this summer, says Corbett.

In-Fusio is also preparing a major North American product launch for the summer that will be coordinated by its newly acquired U.S. operation, mobile entertainment content provider Thumbworks.

The company has also acquired Germany-based mobile games publisher Mobile Scope.

In-Fusio has been working with one of North America's largest web communities for the past four months to develop an online and mobile multiplayer game, says Giles Corbett.

In-Fusio's acquisition of Thumbworks should provide it with the resources it will need to ensure that the launch flows smoothly. But the purchase also means that In-Fusio now has established commercial publish-

ing operations and distribution networks in its three key regions: Europe, Asia and North America.

The publisher had already acquired a U.S.-headquartered company, Cybiko (*MGA*, 11 Dec, 2003), but Corbett says that purchase was aimed more at increasing In-Fusio's games-development resources.

In-Fusio plans to retain the CellToons streaming-audio and -video service Thumbworks recently launched with U.S. cellco Sprint, Corbett says, adding that while games will always be the company's main offering, mobile content can help build on a game's brand.

The purchase of Mobile Scope, on the other hand, is aimed at strengthening In-Fusio's publishing business, says Corbett. In-Fusio was impressed with the expertise of Mobile Scope's management – including CEO Jurgen Goeldner, who becomes In-Fusio's executive vice president for publishing – and by the distribution and promotional deals the company has struck with European operators.

■ testing

Tira Jumps to publishers, but complexity is an issue

Cellco demands are forcing mobile games publishers to plow more resources into porting, says Paul Schaut, CEO at Canada-based porting-technology provider Tira Wireless.

"The operators are asserting their power," Schaut says. "Their deck is limited, so they're telling publishers that if they want to take up space on it, they've got to cover the whole range of handsets."

Having sold its publishing assets last year to focus on its porting business, Tira has relaunched its Jump mobile-content porting platform for internal use by publishers, developers and software-services companies.

Customers will pay an annual subscription of US\$30,000 for the suite, which Schaut says automates the porting process. Developers create a single reference build of a mobile game, and Jump then generates multiple builds for specific devices, languages and mobile operators.

Tira will also charge customers a transaction fee of US\$275-350 per port, depending on volume, plus initial training fees.

Schaut says the suite will give publishers more control over the porting process than if they outsource to an external services company, as many now do. Publisher sources agree that the extra control will be an advantage, since the quality of outsourced ports is notoriously variable.

But other publishers – including UK-based iPhone and German firm Elkware – have already invested in their own in-house porting systems and might be reluctant to junk them in favor of Tira's technology.

Schaut maintains that these companies will be tempted by the fact that using Jump to produce a port takes 15 hours on average, compared with the 40 hours it would take manually. According to Tira's calculations, the decrease in porting time would save

publishers US\$675 per port, which could add up to US\$1.35 million annually for a medium-sized publisher producing 2,000 ports a year.

But sources have expressed reservations about Jump's suitability for more-complex mobile games, because it works from a single reference build.

"The ports are never going to be better than the build from which they're taken," says one publisher. "Any limitations in your original build are going to be cloned faithfully in all the ports, but equally you might not be able to fully exploit the features of more powerful handsets, because they weren't supported in your reference build."

But Schaut says that any transition will be gradual and that customers will initially take a hybrid approach: outsourcing porting to Tira or one of its certified partners while training in-house staff to work with Jump.