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NOKIA ENGLISH LESSONS

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Wall Street Journal

Nokia to offer english lessons for mobile phones in China

To tap into China's growing fascination with technology and the English language.

Jason Leow, Wall Street Journal
28 May 2007

Beijing -- Nokia Corp. on Monday launched a service that enables Chinese to download English lessons using their mobile phones, an effort by the cellphone giant to tap into China's growing fascination with technology and the English language.

Nokia plans to charge users for the new, made-for-China service, called Mobiledu, which includes both audio and text-based lessons. The service aims to capitalize on China's enormous language-learning market, which has been growing quickly as Chinese embrace global business and prepare for an influx of foreign visitors during next year's Olympic games in Beijing.

Mobiledu "is a Chinese service at the moment, but there is no limitation" on where the service will be offered in the future, Marko Vanska, director of Nokia's emerging business unit in China, said in an interview. "We start here because we see education as very important to Chinese culture. Together with the trend of mobility, we think this is a good time" to launch the service, he said.

China's language-learning market is expected to be worth $3.9 billion by 2010, according to a February report by Lehman Brothers. The investment bank said the sector is dominated by English-language providers mostly vying for students.

Mobiledu will shift the focus away from those in school to working adults, by adopting an "anytime, anywhere" learning mode. Mr. Vanska said the service, which also offers career tips and other how-to advice, will charge users about 0.26 cents per download. China has about 480 million cellphone users but it is unclear at this point how many of them will sign on to the service.

One company providing content for Mobiledu is New Oriental Education & Technology Group Inc., which runs China's biggest chain of English learning and test-preparation schools. Michael Yu, New Oriental's chairman and chief executive, said in an interview that the lessons his company has supplied to Mobiledu fit easily into cellphone learning. They include audio clips to improve oral English and text-based lessons on grammar and sentence structure, rather than graphics-heavy materials that often are required for test-preparations.

Joseph Kauffman, New Oriental's assistant vice president for business development, said Mobiledu won't boost New Oriental's revenue much in the next three years, but that joining the service was a strategic decision. "We're looking into the future. One day, people will be using phones as a learning tool, rather than a mobile phone," he said.

Source: Wall Street Journal

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