

Boost Pushes Mobile Social Networking

by Brian Morrissey

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NEW YORK The social networking craze is coming to cell phones.

Boost Mobile is hoping to increase membership in its fledgling cell phone-based social network, called Hookt, with a customized car contest directed at teens and young adults.

The mobile operator has teamed with West Coast Customs, a car customization chain that's developed the MTV series Pimp My Ride. Registrants for the social networking service, which costs 50 cents a day, will be entered into a sweepstakes to win a customized Dodge Charger from West Coast Customs.

Hookt's existing 300,000 customers will also be given an opportunity to enter the contest via an ad that will run on the mobile network's welcome screen. It will promote the contest via radio spots and online ads in places like MySpace.

Social networks appear poised to make the leap from the computer to the cell phone. MySpace has a deal with Helio to offer users access to the social network from Helio's service. Hookt, which Boost introduced a year ago, lets users create a profile and join groups to find others with similar interests.

Fred Ghahramani, director of AirG, the Vancouver-based operator of the Hookt network, said the move of social networking applications from the computer to the cell phone is inevitable because of the ubiquity of mobile telecommunications. It could also cast a wider net: nearly 60 percent of members of AirG-operated mobile networking communities do not have computers.

Advertising would likely continue to complement, not replace, subscription fees for mobile social networks, Ghahramani said, since carriers would use their popularity to lure users into paying for more data services.

"Consumers right now are conditioned to paying on their phones," he said. "On the mobile platform, the telcos won't give things away for free. There needs to be an instant revenue accrual on these services."

Ghahramani said AirG has found click-through rates for targeted promotions to reach 5-6 percent. Deep user data, like age, location, likes and dislikes, provides rich targeting opportunities, he claims.

"You're exposing yourself to hundreds of thousands of people that match your demographic," Ghahramani said.

The Boost Mobile-West Coast Customs campaign, which launched last week, runs through Jan. 15, 2007.

http://www.adweek.com/aw/iq_interactive/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1003286942



Boost hopes to draw more mobile social networkers with the lure of a customized Charger.