



Oddcast Builds Mobile Avatars

Company teams with Wirefly and MySpace on talking ringtone characters to send to friends.

By Michael Cohn

Oddcast partnered with InPhonic's Wirefly subsidiary and News Corp.'s MySpace.com on Tuesday to introduce U-DOO, a ringtone application for mobile phones that allows users to create talking animated avatars with their own voices and use the characters as ringtones on their cell phones and send them to friends.

New York-based Oddcast has been building animated talking avatars for both web sites and mobile phones since 1999. In June, the company received \$4 million in its fourth round of financing, led by Union Square Ventures, with participation from existing investor Itochu of Japan.

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-Adi Sideman, Oddcast

Along the way, the company has been building avatars to help companies and brands such as Starbucks, Better Homes and Gardens, and Career Builder build buzz and publicity on the web and via cell phones.

This time, the company has partnered with InPhonic and its Wirefly subsidiary, which sells and provides comparison-shopping services for wireless calling plans, cell phones, ringtones, and accessories.

U-DOO lets users create personalized ringtones and avatars of their own voice or from pre-recorded messages, and email them to friends, who can then download the ringtones to their phones. The phones can be set to sound the ringtone whenever the friend associated with the avatar calls.

Recipients of a U-DOO message can also create their own U-DOO characters and ringtones and send them back. In addition, U-DOO lets users publish the talking avatar to their MySpace web pages.

The email and MySpace options are free to end users, but the wireless download option is offered by subscription through wireless carriers under a 60-day free trial, with a \$5 monthly charge thereafter.

U-DOO supports downloads to most devices from major wireless carriers in the United States, including Verizon Wireless, Sprint, Cingular Wireless, and T-Mobile.



Expanding to Mobile

Oddcast has been progressing from web-based to mobile avatars as a way for its various partners to reach a wider audience.

“For us it’s the next generation of user-generated avatars,” said Oddcast CEO Adi Sideman. “When you create your U-DOO.com avatar, you choose a character and add audio—either text to speech or prerecorded, and you can send it to your phone, MySpace page, or a friend.”

The company recently launched a campaign for Starbucks called “It’s Red Again,” in collaboration with the Wieden+Kennedy ad agency, in which it created a musical set of web-based holiday cards and characters. Another recent project, for Better Homes and Gardens, allows users to send holiday messages to friends.

For the technology provider Jaduka, Oddcast created Jaduka TV, a collaborative storytelling application, again in partnership with MySpace. With Jaduka TV, users can create their own humorous animated productions on subjects such as politics, Hollywood, sports, and reality TV, with the help of their friends.