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Mobile technology brings print media up to date

By **Mary Lennighan, Total Telecom**

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NeoMedia sees new revenue stream for mobile operators as 2D barcodes begin to take off.

Traditional media companies that rely on advertising are finding life increasingly difficult as the credit crunch begins to bite, but one company believes that its technology provides the answer.

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And what's more, the solution also provides a new revenue stream for telecoms operators.

The market for 2D barcodes - that is, barcodes that can be read using a mobile handset - has changed considerably over the past six months, according to 2D barcode specialist NeoMedia.

"Lots of people are doing trials," said Iain McCready, CEO of NeoMedia, in an interview with *Total Telecom* recently. "[These are] real trials that are leading to commercial launches," he said.

2D barcodes are black and white like the standard striped barcode, but arranged in a matrix pattern. They can be "read" using the camera on a mobile handset and NeoMedia's software, which then takes the user to the advertiser's Web site, usually providing additional information about the company and/or special promotions.

They are often distributed via newspapers, flyers, packaging labels and other print media.

In one case, U.S. pizza chain Papa John's and AT&T ran a scheme whereby consumers were encouraged to use their handsets to read a barcode printed on flyers distributed to households in order to get a free pizza.

"[This] makes that print stuff relevant again," said McCready.

He explained that the first time an end-user uses the barcode reader s/he is prompted for some personal information that will allow for more targeted promotions and advertising in future.

"The data they will capture as a result of that is more valuable," than the cost of sending out the free \$20 pizzas the users received in return, McCready said.

For the mobile operators, "it's another revenue stream," he went on. The operators not only make money from the data usage, but also from providing the infrastructure - billing and so on - for the partner company.

The carriers can "create the ecosystem and control it," McCready said.

The 2D barcode works with any cameraphone, provided the user is able to install the required software, but versions specific to certain devices will likely fuel growth.

An iPhone version was added to Apple's App Store six to eight weeks ago and "we've already had 200,000 downloads," said McCready. The company has also developed a BlackBerry equivalent.

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