

GLOBAL NEWS

Cellular Phones Give Japan Ad Biz a Buzz

Cell Telnets Ring up New Campaigns In All-Out Attack for Subscribers

By Raj Mahtani

TOKYO-The advertising industry in Japan, which posted a 6.1% decline in the last fiscal year, is finding a cause for optimism in the evolving cellular phone market. With the help of a generous dose of deregulation, cellular ID phone network operations have launched ambitious new campaigns in the all-out war to sign up new subscribers.

The contenders, NTT DoCoMo, DDI Cellular Group, Tu-ka Group, and Tokyo Digital Phone, are all sporting campaigns featuring celebrities and some dazzling computer graphics to boot. According to Jun Sakai from Tu-ka's agency, Nikkeisha, such glamorous tactics are essential in order to differentiate oneself in an otherwise uniform industry. While Masahiro Motoki, a primetime TV heartthrob here, projects an image as info-enlightened businessman for Tu-ka, professional baseball players from a local team pitch for Tokyo Digital Phone. There's even Narumi Yashida, another television star, who plies a soft-sell with girl-next-door appeal for IDO.

"We're at a stage of raising awareness levels of the second-generation cellular phones," said Katsumi Nishisako, an account executive at Daiko in charge of media buying for Tuka. In the first six months of 1994, Tu-ka has spent nearly \$15 million on advertising.

Telecommunications giant NTT, with 1,029,000 subscribers already signed up as of April, is well ahead of the pack. Tomokazu Ogawa, the first division marketing director at Dentsu, which handles a part of the NTT account, has been elated by the figures. "The campaigns should be over by now," he said. "But because of the huge demand, we're doing a follow-up [campaign]."

Raj Mahtani is a freelance writer based in Tokyo.