

Israeli mobile markets with music

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All I ever wanted ... all I ever needed is here ... in my cell phone? That's what marketing executives at Israeli mobile operator Pelephone are hoping their customers will sing when offered the chance to see a Depeche Mode concert on their 3G handsets.

The company will offer "a live and exclusive broadcast of the concert on third-generation Pelephones," the company said in a statement.

Of course, that's only if you couldn't get tickets to the actual show, to be held Aug. 3 in Yarkon Park, Tel Aviv. Pelephone is the sponsor of the event, along with music producer Shuki Weiss.

Israel's three mobile operators -- Pelephone, Orange and Cellcom -- are all centering their marketing campaigns, especially for 3G service, on pop music.

Of the three, Pelephone's campaign is the most modest for now. The country's oldest mobile provider maintains an uncluttered, businesslike Web site that doesn't even hint at any MP3 or ringtone downloads or freebies.

Only when the surfer gets to the site for Pelephone's prepaid service marketed to teens and young adults, "Esc," does he find any mention of music other than the Depeche Mode concert.

Orange responded to Pelephone's Depeche Mode concert with the promise of American Idol Kelly Clarkson, but the singer cancelled the

shows last Wednesday, citing a severe throat infection.

Clarkson was to have performed two shows in Tel Aviv, with tickets available only to Orange customers.

However, despite the setback, Orange told the Israeli business newspaper Globes it would continue its specialized music marketing activities. The mobile operator's music branding includes music applications, end-user devices, peripherals and the development of a content library. The Clarkson concerts were supposed to be the centerpiece of the marketing campaign.

Orange's Web site features its music offerings a bit more prominently, under a heading for the company's multimedia package, "oboxlive." On the site, customers can download songs and ringtones, create play lists, and even set up their 3G phone to receive episodes of the latest prime-time soap opera.

Cellcom's music campaign, "Volume," is the oldest of the three companies' pop-centered marketing pushes. The Volume section of the Cellcom Web site is also the most comprehensive of the three. Several pop singers have agreed to have their music available on the site, and customers can browse each artist's category for ringtones, song downloads for a fee, and free song downloads.

But the Cellcom music marketing campaign is most famous for commercials featuring guys surprising their upset girlfriends with romantic songs -- the company calls these "the Israeli songs that make us all emotional."

For instance, last year's commercial followed a young Israeli couple traveling in India. The girl, upset after a fight, got off a bus in New Delhi, only to be cheered up when the boyfriend held his cell phone out

the bus window, making it play a song then popular on the radio -- "Who Loves You More than I Do," by Arkadi Dukhin. Of course, all the Indians in the street knew the words and serenaded her in unison on the guy's behalf.

Not wanting to leave a successful gimmick, the newest Cellcom commercial also features a street full of people serenading a bummed-out girlfriend, but the actual singer, in this case Daniel Solomon, also appears, playing the piano on the sidewalk.

According to music producer Shuki Weiss, who is involved in the Depeche Mode concert and was also part of the push to bring Kelly Clarkson to Israel, the mobile providers' music campaigns don't just benefit the mobile companies, but also the artists.

"The cellular companies' contribution to the music industry is undoubtable," Weiss said via the Pelephone release.

In fact, the artists may be the ones who benefit most from the cellular companies' campaigns of free exposure, since the vast majority of wireless revenue still comes from talk time, according to Philip Redman, the research vice president of telecommunications research company Gartner.

"Data services are still low-cost," Redman told a telecommunications conference in Tel Aviv last week. He cited the example of the text message, which while it constitutes a high volume of cell use is low-cost for the consumer. At the moment, Redman said, the same is true of gaming, ringtones and other downloads.

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