

NTT DoCoMo expands i-mode to Hong Kong

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A decade ago NTT DoCoMo was the mobile arm of Japan's single-biggest phone carrier, which dominated the domestic market that it more or less focused on exclusively. These days, the company continues to be one of the biggest players in the country, but not only does it continue to face pressure from rivals including KDDI, it also is also expanding its outreach beyond the Japanese border.

Its alliance Thursday with Hong Kong's Hutchison Telecom certainly extends its outreach in Asia. DoCoMo agreed to provide i-mode services to Hong Kong and Macau, allowing Hutchison subscribers to use the carrier's text-messaging, chat, gaming and downloading capabilities which continue to be one of the most popular services in Japan.

While financial details of the agreement were not disclosed, DoCoMo said that it will provide the technology and marketing expertise to allow Hutchison to offer i-mode services to its subscribers. The two companies will also be working together on developing integrated circuit card technology services, known in Japan as the wallet-phone, on i-mode enable handsets in Hong Kong and Macau. That would mean that Hutchison phones could be equipped with technology that allows users to download credit onto their cell phones, so they could swipe their handsets on a ticket gate and get onto a train without digging out for money, or buy drinks from a vending machine without using change.

"We are delighted by this partnership. In addition to providing cutting-edge services for our customers, it consolidates our position as Hong Kong's most forward-looking mobile operator, as we continue to lead

innovative developments in the mobile industry and seek to shape the communications market into the future," said Dennis Lui, chief executive officer at Hutchison Telecom.

"With its proven business model and unique service platform, i-mode creates an open gateway for content providers. They will be able to immediately tap into the vast potential of one of the largest mobile customer bases in Hong Kong supported by one of the most advanced mobile networks in the world. We will work with content providers to spearhead the next generation of mobile Internet development in Hong Kong," Lui added.

With the latest deal, DoCoMo will have licensed 16 operators in 24 countries to use its i-mode technology, including Britain's O2, Bouygues Telecom of France, Telefonica Moviles Espana in Spain, the Netherlands' KPN Mobile, and Telstra of Australia. Meanwhile, the company said that the Philippines' SMART Communications is also preparing to launch the service in the country.

"We are confident that this strategic partnership will bring multiple synergies for both companies as well as other member operators. We are also proud to announce our common strategy in bringing our wallet-phone experience from Japan to the region. This new partnership will certainly drive further expansion of i-mode in the global arena," said DoCoMo's senior vice president and managing director of multimedia services, Takeshi Natsuno.

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