

# Mobile motivators

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Image: © Fraunhofer ESK

Whether you are learning a foreign language, training for the city marathon or want to lose five kilos – the digital motivator eCoach will help you to achieve your personal goals. The system runs on any cell phone or PDA and provides just the right amount of motivation.

Instead of the shrill sound of the alarm clock, your cell phone wakes you in the morning with a happy mp3 song. On the display you read the encouraging message, “What a wonderful morning! It’s time to put on your running shoes and go for a jog around the park.”

This digital motivator is called eCoach and is being developed by researchers at the Fraunhofer Institute for Communication Systems ESK. It is intended to help users achieve their personal goals. Irrespective of whether you want to learn a new language or lose weight,

eCoach provides regular motivation to help you reach the goals you have set yourself, for example by sending you training tips, a congratulatory text message or a critical appraisal of your performance.

Dr. Dong-Hak Kim, project manager at the ESK, explains the principle behind eCoach: “The dynamic of eCoach is based on a psychological behavioral model which states that the feedback we get for a particular piece of behavior is important for determining how we conduct ourselves in the future. A kind of dynamic behavioral cycle therefore develops.” What is special about eCoach is that it adapts to the user’s behavior. It communicates independently with the user and asks, for instance, whether they are following their training plan. If users diligently keep to their plan they are rewarded with a cinema voucher, for example – similar to the bonus systems operated by health insurance companies.

Users can decide from case to case whether their cell phone or their PDA is to be their motivator. The devices are connected to the eCoach server via the Internet, so that the service can be used anytime and anywhere. eCoach also has a community function, allowing the establishment of virtual communities made up of people sharing the same goal. The system anonymously compares personal success with that of the other members. Group dynamics and shared experiences help to stimulate and enhance the training.

Source: Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft

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