

# Skype forms tie-up with Japan's KDDI

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The Skype Internet phone program. Japan's number two telecom operator KDDI said it had formed a strategic tie-up with Skype to bring Internet-based communication services to its mobile smartphone users.

Japan's number two telecom operator KDDI said Monday it had formed a strategic tie-up with Skype to bring Internet-based communication services to its mobile smartphone users.

KDDI's mobile service, operating under the "au" brand, will launch the new applications from November for selected handsets and offer Skype-to-Skype calls.

Details of the planned service, including prices, are yet to be released.

Skype, which was founded in 2003, bypasses the standard telephone network by channeling voice, video and text conversations over the

Internet.

KDDI hopes to gradually expand the service to fixed-line telephone and other services.

"Skype on au is a breakthrough in giving customers in Japan unlimited, global communications options, while expanding their calling community to hundreds of millions of Skype users worldwide," said KDDI senior vice president Takashi Tanaka.

"We look forward to working closely with Skype to extend these benefits beyond mobile to broadband, fixed line and cable, and thereby maximise the satisfaction of our customers in every area of our business," he said.

KDDI was preparing to release three kinds of new smartphones, powered by Google's Android software.

Media speculation had been rife that KDDI was looking toward Skype as a way to strengthen its smartphone services.

Japan's number-three mobile phone firm Softbank dominates the local smartphone market with the phenomenally popular iPhone series from Apple.

But it is facing strong competition from Japanese mobile phone giant NTT DoCoMo, which uses high-tech Experia handsets, leaving KDDI to lag behind the two rivals.

Meanwhile, Luxembourg-based Skype has been expanding its partnership with major international communications firms.

It signed a deal with US telecoms giant Verizon in February and formed

a partnership with Avaya Inc. to bring the Internet communications service to US business customers.

Skype interim chief executive officer Adrian Dillon expressed his high hopes for the new partnership with KDDI.

"KDDI's position as a leading network provider in Japan that offers a wide range of communications services, makes it a natural partner for Skype given our vision to make Skype available everywhere and enable users to take their Skype conversations with them wherever they go," he said.

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