

Pinger bringing free text messaging to Europe

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A woman sends text messages in Washington, DC, 2008. Silicon Valley startup Pinger on Wednesday said it will expand into Europe with a German service for free text messaging using Apple or Android-powered gadgets.

Silicon Valley startup Pinger on Wednesday said it will expand into Europe with a German service for free text messaging using Apple or Android-powered gadgets.

Pinger sidestepped the cost of text messaging in Europe by making the service into a game in which [telecom carrier](#) fees for outgoing messages cancel each other out.

"We've come up with a way to neutralize the costs," said Pinger co-founder Joe Sipher.

"In the end, more or less nobody is really paying for texting," he said. "It sort of washes itself out."

Pinger aimed to launch an "SMS Free" service in Germany in August, with Internet voice telephone calling to be added shortly thereafter.

The northern California company intends to expand throughout Europe through the end of this year and into next year.

"The consumer price of [mobile communications](#) in Europe is too high, and for years various companies have been trying to figure out how to make phone number-based mobile communication free," said Pinger co-founder Greg Woock.

"Pinger has changed the game by bringing completely free mobile calling and texting to Europe in a totally unique way," he contended.

Pinger has grown to more than 15 million US users since it launched in 2005 with venture capital backing.

About 1.6 million messages are sent monthly in the United States using Pinger, which serves up two billion ads monthly and has been profitable since 2009, according to Sipher.

The bulk of US Pinger users turn iPod Touch media players into de facto mobile phones by adding text messaging and online voice calling capabilities that take advantage of wireless Internet connections.

While the option of buying text messaging capacity from telecom carriers at wholesale rates made it possible to support the US service with advertising, such isn't the case in Europe, according to Sipher.

In Europe the practice is to charge per message sent, so Pinger designed

a service in the form of a game that gets users to receive as many text missives as they send to essentially avoiding paying carrier fees.

"If there are a million messages going out and a million messages going the other way, in the end nobody owes anybody anything," Sipher said.

"We are trying to eliminate or cost and layer an advertising model on top."

Pinger SMS Free service will be accessible with applications tailored for Apple or Android-powered gadgets.

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