

Mobile phone-charge provider expands

June 1 2012, By Ina Paiva Cordle

Ever run out of battery life on your cellphone just when you need it most? GoCharge wants to be your go-to place to get your smartphone charged - for a fee.

The network of mobile device charging stations is focusing on Florida as its top market, expanding to 75 locations by July, said founder Paul King, who lives in Sunny Isles Beach, Fla.

The roll-out represents the company's second phase of expansion after placing 50 machines in clubs and bars in New York within the past four years. Those machines, sponsored by Patron Tequila and free to users, have drawn 1,000 customers per month per machine, King said.

"South Florida is big on nightlife, and it's a great tourist destination," said King, 27. "So we thought if we had distribution in South Florida we could reach a lot of other countries as well because of people coming in."

"That showed us there is a need and people would likely pay for a charge," he said. "So that is when we decided to expand, starting in Florida, statewide, and we decided to concentrate on the South Florida market."

GoCharge offers several models, sizes and colors of stations to fit different locations. Here, the cost per charge runs about \$3 per 20 minutes for machines at bars, where you hang out while your [phone](#) is charging, to \$5 for about 20 minutes at machines where you can secure

your phone in a locker and walk away. The machines take only [credit cards](#).

The service is aimed at wiping away the worry of running out of battery to contact your friends or call a cab after a night at a club or bar. And the allure for the venue is that customers will stay longer and spend more money while they charge, said Marcel Katz, goCharge's director of Florida operations.

"This is making it easier for people to go out for longer periods of time and enjoy themselves and get their phone charged," said Katz, 24.

And in this age of smartphones, where constant Facebooking, Tweeting and Instagramming use up precious [battery life](#), the need for a charge is electrifying, he said.

"I have a (Samsung) Galaxy, and if I'm using it, I won't last longer than eight hours," Katz said.

No question, smartphones are proliferating. According to the Pew Research Center, 88 percent of all adults in the United States now own a cell phone and 46 percent of all American adults now use smartphones.

"Everyone who has a [smartphone](#), their phone dies unless they recharge it," King said. "When their phone dies, they are desperate."

As soon as a machine was installed last week at Mega Perros in Doral, Fla., customers began using it, said the restaurant's owner, Kevin Toro.

"Most of the time you are on your phone, basically, and that consumes a lot of battery," he said. "It's really handy: You can go to lunch and charge your phone."

More stations are on the way. An application for iPhones - and soon, for Android devices - will lead users to the nearest goCharge station.

GoCharge also brings machines to events, partnering with various companies, including with Red Bull at the Ultra Music Festival in Miami.

King got the idea for goCharge when he was a 21-year-old senior at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh and had to drop off keys with a roommate. He couldn't get in touch with him because his phone had died and he didn't have a car charger.

"I ended up missing my flight," he said. "It ruined my day."

GoCharge has so far raised \$3 million in capital from a handful of investors, who are now King's partners. Last year, the New York-based company generated \$1 million in sales and reached profitability. It is projecting \$2.5 million in sales this year.

"The need is definitely there," King said.

"We think if we get enough out there it will be similar to an ATM. You know anywhere you go there will be an ATM," he said. "People won't be worried that 'my phone is dying.' They will just know wherever they go after work there will be a place to charge their phone."

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Citation: Mobile phone-charge provider expands (2012, June 1) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-mobile-phone-charge.html>

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