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Mediapro dials up cell phone deal

Telcos to be offered soccer highlights

By EMILIANO DE PABLOS, JOHN HOPEWELL

MADRID — Spanish soccer rights owner Mediapro is close to clinching cell phone video and Internet deals with Spain's main telcos.

The pacts will be non-exclusive, and feature 90-second to three-minute highlights on a monthly subscription basis, or goals for a premium mark up, Mediapro partner Jaume Roures told Spanish financial daily Expansion.

In a soccer-loco country, a mobile TV soccer feed might seem like a killer application.

But as things stand — both with mobile video and Spain — Mediapro's imminent new cell phone services look more like a sensible growth strategy than a way of recouping the reported Euros600 million (\$844.2 million) Mediapro is believed to have committed to soccer clubs for the upcoming 2009-10 season.

Revenues for mobile video on demand services will be \$25 million in 2009, said Ronan de Renesse, head of mobile media at London-based analysts company Screen Digest.

Current Spanish mobile TV revenue-drivers are news and sports, including soccer. Prisa-owned cell TV service Canal Plus Futbol Mobile began offering soccer match highlights via telcos Telefonica and Orange from 2008.

Quality and cost could inhibit market growth.

"The quality of viewing experience of soccer matches on mobiles is significantly inferior to those to PCs," said De Renesse.

Even a monthly charge of \$6-\$7 a month would limit Spanish subscribers, given the country's current economic climate, he added.

Also, soccer fans with phones affording Internet access — such as iPhones — can simply connect to YouTube to catch goals, often taken from foreign broadcaster coverage.

An Arab-language TV YouTube summary of Real Madrid's five goals against Germany soccer team Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday evening had received 162,501 hits just 14 hours later.

But Mediapro's mobile TV service will build for the future, De Renesse said.

"Mediapro's mobile video service won't be a game changer but it will improve video content availability on the mobile platform and raise awareness of such services," said De Renesse.

"The increasing adoption of touch screen phones combined with the deployment of faster 3G networks is set to increase the demand for such services in the future. However, whether it can be monetized remains uncertain."

Due to the better quality of handsets and also faster 3G networks, mobile video is set to become more popular in the future.

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