

Client: AskKinjo
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AskKinjo: Taking location-based services to an easy and dynamic level

In 2006, Yoram Shalmon and Eran Brezner decided to use their combined 45 years of experience in location-based services (LBS) technology and business development to redefine the market for LBS.

Yoram's background included 25 years of product and business development in the telecom, LBS and computing industries in the Americas, Australia and the Middle East with companies that included Destinator (previously PowerLoc) Nortel, Celestica, Cadence and GE.

Eran's 20 years in the high-tech sector included several positions as a vice president of product development for LBS and wireless messaging services, as well as providing business-development consulting for startup companies, in Israel, Japan and Canada.

Armed with this wealth of experience, the two men decided there was a better way to provide location-based information services to consumers over wireless devices and deliver a more lucrative and effective channel for advertisers to reach a mobile audience.

In 2007, they met Stéphane Attal, a serial entrepreneur with more than 20 years of experience in building management teams, guiding start-up technology companies to successful exits, and securing venture capital. Stéphane was so impressed with the concept that he joined the company in August 2007, taking the roles of Chairman and CEO. Soon after, Ofir Smadja joined the team as VP of Business Development, bringing on board a wealth of expertise working with wireless carriers. Together, the four men founded AskKinjo Inc.

In recent years, the wireless market has become obsessed with driving high-bandwidth services to so-called "smart" phones in order to provide fresh streams of revenue for wireless carriers and to squeeze greater revenue from existing customers. However, these types of devices still represent about only 10 per cent of the market. Existing ad-formatting and delivery services also leave it up to advertisers to drive their content to consumers, while paid advertising pushed out via SMS runs the risk of being seen as unwelcome SPAM.

The founders decided to take a much more egalitarian and consumer-friendly approach to LBS that would work with any wireless device. Two patents have been filed in both Canada and the U.S. for the incorporation of context-based advertising with LBS and for a system and method of delivering LBS to callers.

Taking its name from the Japanese word for “neighbourhood”, the premise behind the new company was simple: provide a free service in audio format to the consumer supported by paid advertising, in much the same way that television programming is interspersed with commercials.

Users can register online to manage their profile and customize their preferences to locate a range of services in their vicinity through a simple automated speech recognition system (ASR), with the option of keypad entry and complemented by text messaging. The service is accessed by dialing #KINJO. An advantage of the service is that the ASR system allows it to be used largely hands free, a key advantage as regulators across North America crack down on the unsafe use of mobile devices while driving. The keypad entry ensures users get their request across in case a noisy background prevents a smooth ASR operation.

The guiding principle behind AskKinjo is to keep the user experience short, personally relevant and engaging. The user does not need to download software into the mobile device and does not require provisioning by the wireless carrier. Users hear short audio advertisements during the 10 to 12 seconds while their customized information request is being processed.

AskKinjo is building out its #KINJO services in the Toronto area to achieve the critical mass of users and advertisers necessary to attract outside investors for its next phase of growth. The company has aggressive plans to expand its services across North America over the next two years. AskKinjo’s audio-based off-deck services can also be rapidly deployed globally. The current coverage area ranges from Whitby to Burlington and from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe.

To date, AskKinjo has secured partnerships with major content providers and wireless carriers Virgin, Bell Mobility and TELUS. It hopes to add Rogers Wireless in the near future. At present, Rogers and Fido subscribers can access the service by dialing 647-476-6468 in the Toronto area.

AskKinjo services now include traffic, gas, including “Tomorrow’s Gas Price Today”. Parking, ATMs, coffee shops and convenience food will roll out by the end of September. Monthly rollouts of additional services will follow, including restaurants in October.

To learn more, visit www.AskKinjo.com.

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