

# Locator service poised to sweep rural, urban societies

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Like it or not, you may soon have to reveal your location status to your spouse or boss, who will be able to track you to within 300 metres of where you are, as location finders are turning the hottest new killer app in the mobile value-added services domain.

Of course, there is the option to remain invisible, but chances are job and societal pressure may necessitate at least some users to remain locatable as location-based services are catching up in the country as they already have in other countries in Asia-Pacific like Malaysia and Indonesia.

Location-finder services have made a 30% penetration in the Malaysia and Indonesia markets, and industry players estimate that in India there would be a 10% penetration within the first two years. If 10% of the present mobile subscriber base of 570 million opt to use the people finder service at Rs 1 per day, it would add over 20,800 crore to the kitty of mobile operators.

"The very statistic of mobile users far outnumbering net users stacks the odds in favour of VAS services like location finder, which helps mobile users to have groups, stay connected and share information just an internet groups do", says Yogesh Bijlani, country head of Telenity, a mobile VAS player which focuses on location-based VAS services.

Bijlani says India's 50 million computer-connected fades in comparison to the 570 million mobile users, and that the fact that a significant number of mobile users subscribe to alerts like horoscope or cricket scores is a pointer that location-based services like friend finder will have a ready and substantial market in the country.

Airtel has already rolled out the service in India, with a Rs 10 plan for all-you-can-use facility for 10 days, and the early indications are reportedly encouraging.

Bijlani says Telenity has focused on the lower end of the pyramid, which is where he feels VAS services have a far better chance of success. "We have ensured that the service works even on a \$10 handset, and subscribers can simply avail of the location finder service by dialing a particular number", he says.

Usage patterns so far have been as varied as parents using it to locate kids going for tuition, delivery staff being tracked on work, food being heated just before a spouse reaching home, having already located the spouse's position vis-à-vis the house, senior executives being able to locate car and driver without having to give a missed call, and college students being able to share with buddies the quality of a lecture under way, giving advice to them to stay off or come in.

Bijlani says the service would be even more useful in rural areas, considering that one cannot stay connected on computers when there is a power failure that lasts several hours, and that the full impact of the service will be revealed when the application is leveraged for mobile advertising, mobile marketing, social advertising and information services.