

WAP into your food

Swedish company AU-System AB plans to revolutionise the restaurant business with WAP technology. **ANDREW WEE** looks at what the package can offer to industry

CASH registers and menus in restaurants could be replaced by WAP-enabled (wireless application protocol) mobile phones as early as August if Swedish company AU-System AB's plans take off.

Sweden's largest IT services company opened its Asia-Pacific HQ here in March and has partnered with Singapore Telecommunications, National Computer Systems, Temasek Polytechnic, and Genovate Solutions to launch 1,000 WAP-enabled sites by this year-end. The company also recently tied up with Virtual Map to provide mapping technology for Singapore users; it plans to offer similar information for Hongkong, Thailand and Malaysia users next quarter.

"This year 1,000 individuals in Singapore will get WAP training through our seminars or one of our partners programmes," said Mack Palomaki, managing director of AU-System's Singapore office. "About 240 people have already participated in our WAP seminars."

Temasek Polytechnic said earlier that 250 students and professionals would get WAP training through its infocomm diploma and specialist programmes. IT firm Genovate's managing director Anton Ravindran said 500 professionals could go through its WAP training — which is certified by AU-Systems.

"AU-Systems provides the concepts and the technical issues, and works with local partners to set up and run the projects," Mr Palomaki said. "We jointly own the intellectual property rights."

AU-System said it has developed WAP "packages" which are customisable templates targeted at specific industries, such as travel, entertainment, retail and the government. It is currently discussing with computer equipment manufacturers to develop a printer which can be attached to a WAP-enabled phone.

"Almost all restaurant owners have mobile phones, but not all have computers," Mr Palomaki said. "We have come up with a restaurant package which has different templates and can be customised to different restaurants. We want to make the packages fairly low-cost and easy for them to use. There is tremendous interest by restaurants here and by our partners as well."

He said restaurant customers could access menus on its WAP site, get vicinity maps and directions, and place orders. The company is also working on e-payments and accounting modules. Restaurant owners can print receipts with their

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WAP phones, and do away with point-of-sale terminals and cash registers. They can also keep track of orders, statistics and vouchers. By connecting to a central WAP server, restaurants can download transaction and accounting records.

AU-System plans to tie up with a Singapore firm to jointly market the package to restaurants, and expects 400 restaurants to sign up for the service. Pricing for the solution would be set by the business partner, but it is expected to be "fairly low-cost."

"We are the first in the world to provide a complete WAP package, while others have developed applications on an ad hoc basis. Within 18 months we could see WAP applications used by every Singapore family," Mr Palomaki said. "We can develop applications very quickly, but with new technology, people have problems understanding it. The complexity of applications has to be masked by simple user interfaces."

Other growth areas include pack-

ages for government services; transportation; professional services for doctors, lawyers and dentists; and mobile tradesmen such as plumbers and electricians.

Of the 1,000 WAP-enabled sites expected to be launched here this year, Mr Palomaki said 40 per cent of the sites could be restaurants, 30

per cent could be professionals, 15 per cent could be basic information services such as weather reports and traffic information. The rest would come from the entertainment, travel and retail sectors.

The company is talking with legal firms to secure copyright, patents and trademarks for the intel-

lectual property it is currently developing. It expects to gross \$2 million in revenue this year, mainly through providing WAP training and consultancy; this is expected to double next year. However, royalties from its WAP services are not expected to be significant for the next two to three years, he said.