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## BUSINESS

### Dacha Season Reaps Hot Mobile Ringers

By Natalya Chumarova, Alexander Yankevich  
Special to The St. Petersburg Times

The city's mobile phone operators turned their attention to Leningrad Oblast this summer, in particular to the region's dacha-owners. According to experts, mobile phone traffic increases by 30 percent in the region during the hot season, and, to take more advantage, companies began offering anything from discounts on calls to new service centers and 'pretty' numbers. Busy Bees

One of the most active firms was VimpelCom (under its Beeline trade mark). As early as May this operator launched the campaign '50 percent Discount on calls in Leningrad Oblast,' where all out-going calls crossing Oblast boundaries were half price. From autumn to the end of the year this offer will only apply to calls within the Oblast. But for the operator this offer is considered supplementary to a new service that allows it to establish the whereabouts of a subscriber. The latter uses Cell Info technology, or a 'mobile index,' which comprises the functions of the GSM network, allowing operators to deliver a variety of information to the subscriber's mobile, depending on their location. The technology is realized using Celltick, which tracks the movement of a subscriber by transmitting a signal from one base station to another.

Messages are circulated by separate channels, not using commercial frequencies, appearing on the phone as captions or running text. In this particular case, on the mobile phones of all of the city's Beeline subscribers is displayed the caption PETERSBURG or LENOBLAST, depending on the tariff zone where the base station is located.

According to VimpelCom's press secretary in St. Petersburg, Yevgenia Aleshko, the Cell Info project has increased company sales in Leningrad Oblast from 500 to 1,400 contracts a day, and the company's share of the Oblast market from 22 percent to 29 percent.

"Other things that stimulated sales included adverts starring Andrei Arshavin, a well-known player at Zenit, St. Petersburg's premier league football club, as well as additional campaigns at the point of sale," Aleshko said.

"Throughout the summer, from May to September, the tariffs 'Speak easier' and 'Your time - Oblast' drove the company's sales. Connections grew by 85.8 percent over the summer, compared to 24 percent over the same period last year," he said. Silver Polish

Another company that looked to gain from the seasonal rise in Oblast traffic, was MegaFon Northwest. From the first half of June till mid-August the company offered the gift of a 'Silver number.' On connecting to MegaFon Northwest in one

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of five regional centers (Podporozhe, Sosnovi Bor, Luga, Volkhov and Slantsi) the subscriber may choose a 'silver' number with a federal code. According to the company, the campaign was important more in terms of its image, aimed at raising awareness of their new service centers in Leningrad Oblast. Margarita Gorbacheva, head of MegaFon Northwest's press service, identified the opening of the company's Vyborg service center in 2004 as the beginning of MegaFon Northwest's efforts at serving regional subscribers.

"Today we have already opened 11 such centers, with another two due to open this year," she said.

According to her, 'Silver number' was the first such regional campaign and worked quite well.

"The number of those connecting at service centers taking part in the promotion increased on average one and a half times. Apart from that it raised awareness of our centers, and visitors numbers increased a number of times," Gorbacheva said.

As far as simple discounts were concerned, for the fourth year in a row everywhere under MegaFon Northwest's coverage, including Leningrad Oblast, received throughout the summer the service 'White Nights.' This offers free calls between MegaFon Northwest subscribers every day from midnight to 8 a.m. Mobile Technicalities

As for the last of the 'big three' mobile phone firms, Mobile Telesystems, or MTS, focused their activity on the development of technical infrastructure. Already in March the company released new equipment in almost every area of Leningrad Oblast. As a result, the capacity of the operator's network increased to 3.7 million numbers, which, among other things, allowed the provision of continuous access to additional services, including SMS, MMS, and the transmission of data. It is worth noting that such modernization was aimed both at Oblast and city residents passing the summer at dachas and used to the convenience of their mobile phones. Sky Access

In the Leningrad Oblast the company Sky Link traditionally organizes events selling the merits of its mobile internet services. Many of Sky Link's subscribers live in St. Petersburg, but regularly travel, for business or pleasure, into the Oblast.

"This summer we advertised both on the beach and at events both in the city and Oblast, with the accent always placed on our competitive advantage mobile internet," said the head of PR at Delta Telecom (Sky Link St. Petersburg), Kirill Voloshin.

Of particular note this summer was Sky Link's services at the musical open air Castle Dance Ice Edition 2006, that took place in June in Vyborg. The company set up an internet tent, where they demonstrated their services and provided internet access for the festival's press.

Depending on a client's monthly expenses, each receives 'Silver,' 'Gold,' or VIP status, affecting the amount of supplementary discounts and reductions on the acquisition of new Sky Link terminals.

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