

FREE LOVE FROM BLYK: ZERO CENTS PER MINUTE



Due to launch in the UK in a few months, **Blyk** aims to change the way the mobile telecoms industry works. The company describes itself as a pan-European free mobile operator for young people, funded by advertising. Free and advertising being the key words here. Blyk will operate as an MVNO or mobile virtual network operator, meaning it will buy wireless services from an existing operator and resell them under the Blyk brand. Or, in this case, give them away. While several mobile players are dabbling in free minutes or free digital content for users willing to view ads (see: **Xero Mobile**, **Amp'd** and Virgin Mobile's **Sugar Mama**), Blyk intends to take a different approach. The service will be entirely free, and targeted to a fairly narrow age group: 16-24 year olds. When they sign up for Blyk, users need to fill out a detailed questionnaire that includes questions about their interests. Which potentially makes things very interesting for both advertisers and users. Advertisers can market to very specific groups, and users are more likely to be engaged by advertising if it's highly relevant to them. Ads on Blyk will also be more integrated into the service than merely displaying texts and images; exact details on how that will work aren't yet available. The business model is similar to free daily newspapers or most of the internet's content: consumers offer some attention in return for free goods and services: a trend that has been dubbed **free love** by trendwatching.com. And advertising on a medium that users have with them every waking hour makes sense, especially if it can be targeted to a very narrow audience. As spending on marketing and advertising over wireless networks is expected to increase sharply over the next few years, this is one to watch! It doesn't hurt that Blyk's CEO and co-founder is Pekka Ala-Pietilä, formerly a long-time president of Nokia. 😊 Spotted by: Ozgur Alaz

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Website: <http://about.blyk.com>

Contact: <http://about.blyk.com/contacts>