

# The key ingredients of our growth are differentiation, intelligent creativity and communicating with the market

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Alex Bennett, CEO of FRiENDi mobile, talks about the company's strategy to use technology to improve sales.

FRiENDi mobile, the third largest mobile operator in Oman with over 600,000 strong customers base and around 15 per cent market share in the country, is investing more on sales and technology upgrades to boost growth in the near future.

The company functions in the Mobile Virtual Network Operators (MVNO) segment. It buys data units, voice and SMS from the host operator Omantel and sells them after repackaging it.

Alex Bennett, CEO of FRiENDi, says “Despite the need for constant innovation, differentiated ideas and viewing your portfolio through the lens of the customer, one of the key aspects of the growth of any MVNO is of course sales and distribution. To grow faster, you must have better access to dealers and ultimately, the customer. We have always been strong in distribution thinking but with investment in new people and technology, FRiENDi is getting more sophisticated about how we operate sales and distribution channels. This is fundamental to how we connect to the market.” .

He adds, “Having great prices and promotions, is one thing but ensuring it that your distribution network and points of sales understand the offer, can recognize the value, and have the right materials and training to generate customer sales is another thing.”

Bennett, who joined the company in August, was earlier working with European telecommunications giant ACN, where he was the vice president of European Services, based in Amsterdam. He has over 15 years

of experience in the industry and has expressed his desire to work on aggressive growth plans to tap the large expatriate population in Oman to grow FRiENDi's consumers base.

FRiENDi, which primarily caters to the expatriate population in the country, has been enjoying good patronage since its inception in 2009. The country's fast-paced economic growth in the last five years have led to a rise in expatriate population and this has provided FRiENDi an opportunity to market its services and products among them, catering to their needs for mobile connectivity and Internet data.

The company has been able to increase its market share to around 15 per cent this year and it believes that there would be enough opportunities for its growth in the segment. "Since the launch of FRiENDi, in 2009, there has been a constant increase in expatriate population in the country and we see a great growth opportunity here. While we offer a range of services for the modern mobile user in Oman today, we have always been focused on serving the expatriate market segment with great value international calls and of course in today's market, the data plans required in this world of smartphone usage," says Bennett, while explaining the growth potential for the company.

"The key population segments in which we are seeing growth are from the Asian sub-continent communities apart from having good growth from an already loyal Omani subscriber base. As the expatriate population is touching 2mn, in a population of 4.2mn, I believe that there is still huge scope for growth for FRiENDi."

The company also seek to expand their presence among other nationalities like Lebanese, Sudanese, Europeans and Filipinos, by offering economical data plans and competitively priced international calling rates.

The company has already kickstarted new initiative to augment growth in consumer base and sales. Bennett says, "We have a sales and distribution team, whom we call merchandisers. They visit all our point of sales, such as small shops, barber shops, electronic stores or other of our many different retailers to build a relationship with the dealer, and as ambassadors of FRiENDi and provide them SIM card stock if required. We support them with point of sales materials, posters, leaflets and also providing them training."

FRiENDi recently recruited Omanis to the position of field sales merchandisers who have been trained and motivated to carry out key responsibilities such as in-store dealer trainings, dealer sign-ups and also the general sale of FRiENDi mobile products.

Bennett says, "More than just merchandisers, these key personnel work as brand representatives of FRiENDi mobile; living by the company's values and help in training dealers to provide quality mobile services, be it data plans or voice calls. We know that we face strong completion in the marketplace from other mobile operators, so maintaining laser focus on distribution is core to our success."

The company is investing more on technology and devices to support merchandising.

"The key ingredients of our growth are differentiation, intelligent creativity, communicating with the market, and to make sure that the we offer attractive prices to customers.

"Right now we are investing on sales force technologies to improve our sales and to have better connectivity with our consumers as well as dealers. Earlier fax machines were used to activate SIM cards. Now we have developed dealer apps, which enable instant activations and this also helps in promoting sales and sophistication for the dealer in serving customers."

As part of the sales force technology drive, the company will be providing GPS-enabled devices to merchandisers. These devices gives information such as the shops they have to visit that day, the shops that need SIM cards or recharge coupons. The device also provides detailed route maps.

Bennett believes that going forward, data usage will be the future of the mobile industry as popularity of smartphones are prompting consumers to use Internet more often.

“That said, there is still great demand for great value national and international voice services and this remains a cornerstone of FRiENDi business and area in which is serves customers”.

“But data is the new currency. More and more people are using smart phones and so we see an increase in data consumptions every month. People like you and I are using data everyday and everyone enjoys the option to consume the internet in their own way,” says Bennett, while adding that the mobile market in Oman has great potential to grow further.

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