

Off to a slow start-up

By NICK MILLER

There is a noticeable lack of support for small Australian IT companies trying to take advantage of the global boom in mobile technology, a local venture capital company warns.

Last week, Victoria launched the country's first mobile data industry cluster, known as the "Mobility Mesh".

A \$100,000 seeding grant from the State Government was matched by \$100,000 from MAP Venture Partners and other organisations including Hume City council, Ericsson, Intel, the ABC and Swinburne and La Trobe universities.

Six companies are already working within the cluster, in Ericsson's old research labs in Broadmeadows.

MAP partner Marco Marcou said mobility IT was entering boom times, with 3G and faster networks opening up new areas such as mobile TV.

But while Australia ranks well in research, a new company with a promising idea can find it hard to take the next step.

"Australia is not served well for early-stage developers," Mr Marcou said. "It's embarrassing — the OECD spends four times what we do per capita. We believe there is so much good quality innovation in Australia, it just needs some commercialisation."

"This is such a hot space. 3G and WiMax is exploding. There are 100 million 3G subscribers around the world and there will



MoStyle's Alex Young.

PICTURE: SAM D'AGOSTINO

be 500 million in the next three years.

"The technology is there, now the networks are looking for applications and services."

mComms, one of the new companies in the cluster, has already found a buyer for its software that monitors video streams delivered over a mobile network. Hutchison is using it for mobile video products such as the popular *Big Brother* clips.

"We saw a niche for our products, especially in mobile TV," mComms director Grant Simonds said. "But we needed more skills around commercialising this — marketing, corporate structure, fundraising and business strategy."

"This gives us support and a framework for our business."

"On our own there are things we may not get right first time and the pace of development is very fast — you don't

have time to sit back and focus on the commercial aspects."

mComms joined the cluster late last year in its previous life as MAP's design, development and commercialisation program.

Other companies include Mo-Style, which is building a .mobi platform with media sharing, social networking and channel authoring.

CoolRock Software, which provides email encryption and archiving, recently won a big BHP-Billiton contract and BIG-mate has a monitoring solution for heavy mobile equipment.

The new cluster plans to use its relationship with the Hume council to test high-tech mobile broadband in the area.

Launching the cluster last week, Victorian Minister for Information and Communication Technology Tim Holding said there was no doubt about the enormous market opportunity in next-generation mobile technologies.

"Today we are launching an Australian-first cluster of organisations which are collaborating in a unique testbed environment, boasting the most comprehensive mobile testing equipment in the Asia-Pacific region," he said.

"(It will) give start-up companies the unique opportunity to test new mobile applications across a variety of wireless platforms, such as WiMAX and 4G."

"This collaborative approach means Victorian ICT companies are on a fast track to commercial success."

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