



Digital Dealmakers



Ashok Narasimhan

Chairman, CEO and co-founder, July Systems

News

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By Daisy Whitney

The player: Ashok Narasimhan, chairman, CEO and co-founder of July Systems in Santa Clara, Calif.

The Play: July Systems bundles content for mobile phones, such as ringtones, video, wallpaper and news articles. Most of that content lives today on cell phones in silos, or separate sections of the phone's menu. July Systems works with the content providers to link that content together so phone users can easily jump from a video to a ringtone, for instance.

The pitch: July Systems' technology, which can link the different varieties of cell phone content, solves a big problem in the cell phone marketplace today. Most carriers offer content in those categories but do not link them easily by content provider. "Our technology overcomes the technology barriers at the carrier's end," Mr. Narasimhan

said. "Standards are different from carrier to carrier, and we have been able to create a platform that abstracts all that complexity."

In the mix: The company recently inked a deal with Lifetime Television. July Systems also has worked with MTV, VH1, Comedy Central and Spike TV, so that their varied cell phone content can be accessed seamlessly by consumers across carriers like Verizon and AT&T, he said. July Systems primarily targets content providers as customers. "If you are watching VH1 on your mobile phone, you can send a text message and then click on a ringtone," he said. The company also is reaching out to sports leagues.

The backstory: Mr. Narasimhan started the company in the garage of his house in Los Altos Hills, Calif., in 2001. July Systems is his fourth startup. He initially funded the company with his own money. The company originally targeted wireless carriers before focusing on content providers.

The money guys: July Systems has since raised more than \$30 million in venture funding from Sequoia Capital, Charles River Ventures, Motorola Ventures and others. July Systems does not license its technology, making money via a revenue share from content providers. "We make money when they make money," Mr. Narasimhan said.

Pros: More consumers are viewing mobile phone content, and big brands are getting into the business.

Cons: "The challenges are to be able to mediate between the carrier and the content guys, because the carriers do not want to be a dumb pipe," he said.

Background: Mr. Narasimhan, born and raised in India, moved to the United States 20 years ago. He attended the University of Madras in India and received an MBA from the India Institute of Management. His other business ventures have included Wipro Systems, an IT company in India. He also worked at VeriFone. He lives in Los Altos Hills with his wife and three children.

Who knew? Mr. Narasimhan loves spicy food and says the only time he has ever been out-spiced was by a Japanese woman, who took his challenge at a business dinner in Tokyo. She ate incredibly spicy food without batting an eyelid, while he was choking and sweating bullets, he said.