



Skype's the limit

New partnership will allow 3 users to keep in touch wherever they go

IT ALMOST SOUNDS too good to be true. Software that allows free computer-to-computer phone calls to anywhere in the world, is easy to use, has impressive sound quality and also supports conference calling and instant messaging, and an array of other features including calls to and from landline and mobile phones.

That, in a word, is Skype, the Internet tool that is changing the telecommunications world. Skype was created by Sweden's Niklas Zennström and Denmark's Janus Friis, the brains behind the Kazaa file sharing phenomenon. Launched in 2003, Skype has millions of registered users around the world and last year on-line auction site eBay agreed to pay a cool USD2.6 billion (HKD20.28 billion) to buy the company.

This extraordinary success story is based on its simplicity. The software is easy to install and the user requires nothing more than a headset or speaker. While Skype-to-Skype calls remain free, users must pay a small fee to call landline or mobile phones.

Skype is working with telecommunications companies that share a vision of providing better ways for people to communicate. Among those companies are Hutchison Whampoa Limited's 3, Hutchison Global Communications (HGC) and Beijing-based

TOM Online, China's leading wireless Internet company.

In February, 3 and Skype announced a plan to give people the freedom to enjoy Skype anywhere they go, whether at home, in the office or on the move while on Hutchison's 3 networks.

This partnership will enable Hutchison to directly tap into the 75 million people using Skype across the Hutchison territories and promote the benefits of using Skype on Hutchison's networks. "With Skype on mobile devices, people can keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues wherever they go. This takes Skype beyond the PC into the mobile world," said Mr Zennström, Skype CEO and co-founder. "I believe this will accelerate the adoption and use of Skype to new levels."

3 Group is expected to be the first to market the Skype-enabled mobile devices and following trials, plans to launch later this year in Austria, Australia, Hong Kong, Sweden, the UK and Italy.

"Skype on 3G smartphones, datacards and other devices is a service that our customers will be thrilled to use," said Christian Salbaing, Managing Director of Europe Telecommunications at Hutchison 3. "With Skype they can talk for as long as they want with their friends around the world. It will be a great addition to our existing wide range of multi-media mobile broadband services."

Skype also has a distribution partnership with HGC in Hong Kong through the HGC-Skype portal. In Mainland China, Skype has signed a joint venture with TOM Online, a subsidiary of TOM Group, to further cement their strategic partnership in China's rapidly growing online communication market. 

