

TONY MA is facing a lot of late nights this summer but he doesn't mind one bit. In fact, he can't wait. Mr Ma, a life-long football fan, is the COO of ESD Services Limited which has been granted the exclusive rights to operate the official FIFA World Cup online store in Asia and the Middle East.

ESD Services, the leading e-commerce and e-government services provider in Hong Kong, is responsible for operating the FIFAworldcup.com Online Shop in 50 countries including Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, India, and Indonesia. The tournament, to be staged in Germany between June 9 and July 9, is the biggest sports event in the world and because of the time difference many of the games will be played in the early morning in Asia.

Mr Ma can barely contain his enthusiasm. "Yes, it will mean staying up late to catch the big matches but it will be worth it," he said. "I'm an England fan but it is always a pleasure to see the best teams in the world compete. Brazil have got great players like Ronaldinho and Ronaldo, so they will be the favourites. Soccer is definitely the number one sport in Asia. People are just crazy about it."

The FIFAworldcup.com store will provide football fans with everything from shirts and caps to sports accessories, footballs and souvenirs. Available in English, Chinese and Korean, the store will provide round-the-clock online service until the end of 2006. "We are very proud and excited to provide memorabilia to millions of football fans in Asian countries," he said. "With our sound Internet and e-commerce expertise, we believe customers will have an enjoyable shopping experience in the online store. It is the first time FIFA has awarded these licences by region, which shows how important Asia has become."

The World Cup will also illustrate how online shopping has become an important retail tool in parts of Asia. "South Korea will be the biggest market for us," said Mr Ma. "The Koreans are in the finals in Germany and reached the semi-finals four years ago, so expectations are very high. E-commerce in South Korea is very strongly established and online shopping is particularly popular. Almost everyone has broadband. The Hong Kong market is much smaller but is growing very fast."

And so is ESD Services. A joint venture between Hutchison Whampoa Limited and Hewlett-Packard, the company started with

a contract to implement the government's Electronic Service Delivery Scheme and launched an award-winning bilingual portal, *ESDlife* (www.esdlife.com) in January 2001. *ESDlife* now offers more than 200 public services from over 50 government departments and public agencies. Through the establishment of a vast digital information infrastructure, the company is dedicated to providing a one-stop shop for public and commercial electronic services, as well as professional web solutions.

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“ESDlife kick started online shopping in Hong Kong which helped to promote our brand in a very short time,” explained Mr Ma. “The FIFA contract is proof of our leadership in this area.”

The World Cup is only the beginning. In future the company is looking to partner more famous global brands to expand from its domestic Hong Kong market to Asia and Mainland China in particular.

ESDlife has used its position as a provider of round-the-clock online public services to develop related commercial services, IT services and also drive online advertising. The results have been exciting.

There are some 290,000 e-government transactions processed every month, of which over 70,000 involve online payment. This has made ESDlife one of the Hong Kong websites processing the highest number of online cash transactions and has enabled it to build a strong customer base that is ready for online shopping.

The ESDlife online shopping platform sweeps away the barriers of traditional sales channels, which require huge set-up and operating costs, and allows merchants to run their online business at minimal operational expense. The e-shop business has grown remarkably since its launch. It now offers a wide variety of gifts, digital products, household appliances and wedding related items. In June 2005, Zignup.com started offering a wide range of courses and activities – from dancing and yoga to wakeboarding and make-up courses.

CUP

*FIFA contract
a real winner for
ESD Services*

By Jon Marsh



But it is the wedding booking service that has perhaps made the biggest impression. Within a year of launch, 85 per cent of Hong Kong’s advance marriage appointments were booked online. ESDlife has built up the largest community of wedding couples in Hong Kong, its Wedding Channel recording more than 100,000 visitors in February 2006 alone. Not surprisingly, the benefits of ESDlife have been quickly recognised by advertisers and the “click rate” for banner advertisements on the portal is much higher than the industry average.

The ESDlife project has also helped build public confidence in online transactions and electronic payment. “Having brands like Fortress, Sony, Samsung and Apple in our shop is a big help,” said Mr Ma. “People are more comfortable buying online when the brand is a household name. In fact we are expecting a surge in television and DVD recorders sales before the World Cup. After all, it’s a great opportunity for people to upgrade to a flat screen!”

Left: Ronaldinho will aim to be among the goals when Brazil defend the World Cup in Germany this summer.

