

PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SmashPhone Launches Free Daily Comic Strips on Mobile Phones

Beverly Hills, CA – May 5, 2006 – SmashPhone, a Beverly Hills-based start-up, today announced it's bringing to mobile phones the nationally recognized comic strips *Girls & Sports* and *The Meaning of Lila*. A new comic strip called *Mostly Heads* will also debut. For the first time, comic strip fans will be able to see popular comic strips for free on their mobile phones. Bringing comic strips to mobile phones opens up a broad and younger audience to advertisers over traditional newspaper publication.

The Comic Strips

SmashPhone and Creators Syndicate (a multimillion dollar corporation that provides comic strips to newspapers and online) entered into a licensing agreement in April 2006, to make popular comic strips available on mobile phones. The first two newspaper comic strips released for mobile phones through Creators Syndicate are *The Meaning of Lila* and *Girls & Sports*.

The Meaning of Lila was created by John Forgetta, currently editorial director at American Greetings. Lead character Lila, who is somewhere between Mary Tyler Moore and Carrie Bradshaw, appeals to a younger 14 to 30-year-old audience. *The Los Angeles Times*, *The San Francisco Examiner*, *Denver Post* and dozens of other newspapers have carried *Lila* daily since its 2004 debut.

Girls & Sports was created by Justin Borus and Andrew Feinstein, a former Warner Bros. animation producer. Exploring the two things most important to young guys -- watching sports and dating girls -- *Girls & Sports* also tracks to a younger audience. *The New York Daily News*, *Denver Post*, *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, *Stars and Stripes*, and over 175 other newspapers carry *Girls & Sports*.

Mostly Heads is a new comic strip created by Darren Jones, a former E! Entertainment Network producer and co-founder of SmashPhone. *Mostly Heads* is an alternate universe in which Leon, Buddy, Ivy, and Julie have heads and hands, but no bodies. They don't seem to miss them... a comic strip about nothing except life's little misadventures.

The Significance of Comic Strips with Mobile Phones

This week at the Los Angeles Times Festival of Books during a panel discussion on the decline of newspaper comic strips, *Opus* creator Berkeley Breathed warned, "I don't think you'll ever see another *Calvin & Hobbes*, *Bloom County* or *Doonesbury* again." The Pulitzer Prize-winner explained, "The popularity of those strips was built on a young audience...." The Los Angeles Times covers the situation in an article, "Comic strips' plight isn't funny, cartoonists fear that newspapers aren't changing with the times to reach a print-averse younger generation" (April 27, 2006).

Newspaper audiences have grown older and circulation of newspapers is in general decline. So where is the younger audience? On mobile phones! SmashPhone is smashing the barriers that comic strips face with a shrinking newspaper market. The Wall Street Journal reported on May 2, 2005, that U.S. newspaper circulation is at 55 million and falling. But, AdWeek reported on January 6, 2006, that the number of U.S. mobile phones is 183 million and growing!

How SmashPhone Works

SmashPhone users download a small free Java-based comic strip player to their phones. The back-end server runs on Linux (Fedora). “Using Linux for our mobile server was obvious,” says SmashPhone co-founder Robin Rowe. “Linux is a better, faster, cheaper approach for serving mobile phone content.” SmashPhone software is compatible with popular phones from Cingular, Sprint, and T-Mobile.

“To view comic strips on your mobile phone requires your phone be compatible with a popular mobile technology called Java,” says SmashPhone co-founder Robin Rowe. “We choose Java as our mobile technology platform for its mass market popularity.” Over 700 million phones worldwide, about a third of all mobile phones, are Java-compatible according to a June 25, 2005, report in *Wireless Business & Technology*. The number of Java phones is predicted to double in two years.

To view comic strips, a consumer needs to install the SmashPhone comic strip player on his or her mobile phone and also have enabled standard mobile Internet access through a data plan with the phone’s carrier. SmashPhone is compatible with most mobile phones that have color screens and most U.S. carriers including Cingular, Sprint, and T-Mobile. However, SmashPhone is not currently compatible with Verizon because that carrier relies on an incompatible technology called BREW.

To download the SmashPhone player a user could enter or “thumb in” a particular URL in the phone, but it’s hard to type anything on typical mobile phones. An easier route is to visit the www.SmashPhone.com website with a computer and fill out a form there to have the URL sent as a text message to the phone. (SmashPhone promises to never spam anyone’s phone.) After that text message arrives on the phone, the user clicks on the URL or selects “Go To” from the phone’s menu, then follows the prompts to install the SmashPhone player in the phone’s Games folder. When the user opens the SmashPhone player from the phone’s Games menu the player will stream the current day’s comic strips.

The SmashPhone player uses Java and a lossless image compression standard called PNG to display beautiful comics. The SmashPhone player uses much less bandwidth, has much better image quality, and is compatible with many more phones than would be possible using mobile video streaming technology to deliver comic strips. SmashPhone doesn’t use MMS or MPEG.

The SmashPhone player is has one player that’s compatible with many different phones. On mobile phones there are many more operating systems than on computers (where software is tailored to Windows, Macintosh or Linux). The SmashPhone player has an advantage over typical mobile applications because it isn’t limited to a particular carrier or specific models of phones. The SmashPhone player itself is less than 20kb. It’s so small because many of the player’s features are implemented not in the player itself but in code running on Linux at the SmashPhone server.

Using customized open source Apache server software, the SmashPhone Linux server hosts the Java mobile player app for installation on phones and also streams the comic strips to the player once it’s installed.

Is It Really Free?

SmashPhone isn't charging consumers anything because the comics network will be advertiser-supported, a business model similar to broadcast television. However, carrier data bandwidth costs can apply. Typical carrier bandwidth charges range from no additional charge (for users on an unlimited data plan) to one cent per kilobyte (for users on a pay-as-you-go plan). For one 50kb comic strip that would be zero to fifty cents, depending on carrier plan. Advertisers will be charged five cents per impression, comparable to premium CPM rates common for advertising on the Internet.

The player software is currently free to encourage adoption, but expected to eventually sell for \$5. Installing the SmashPhone player can cost about twenty-five cents in carrier data download charges. Because the purpose of the text message is solely to install the SmashPhone player, it's only sent once by the SmashPhone server. That text message can be forwarded by users to their friends and family to install the SmashPhone player on their phones. Typical cost for one SMS text message is five cents, depending on carrier plan.

No carrier data bandwidth for comic strips is consumed until the user actually opens the SmashPhone player to view comics. There's no commitment and no hassle. The user can simply delete the SmashPhone player from the phone's Games folder to uninstall it.

About SmashPhone

SmashPhone co-founders Robin Rowe and Darren Jones had each worked with mobile video, for channels at Sprint and E! respectively. Founding SmashPhone was a thinking-outside-the-box solution, a path to overcome the limitations they'd encountered in working with mobile video. A recent AdWeek article reported 183 million U.S. mobile phones, but that only 13 million are video-capable...a mere 7%!

SmashPhone was founded with the idea of delivering mass media to more than 700 million existing multimedia-capable mobile phones worldwide, many more screens than mobile video can reach. An advertiser-supported model was chosen based on an estimate published in the New York Times (January 16, 2006) that predicts the mobile marketing sector will leap from \$45 million today to be \$1.3 billion in 2009.

Based in Beverly Hills, SmashPhone is a start-up 100% owned and funded by its co-founders. Robin Rowe is a former chief technologist and enterprise manager for Fortune 500 defense company SAIC and was a research technologist at DreamWorks Animation. He writes as a technology journalist for many magazines and had a column at Linux Journal. Darren Jones created daily mobile video content as a producer at E! Entertainment Network. He was assistant to Francis Ford Coppola on *The Outsiders* and *Rumblefish*. He's been developing the comic strip *Mostly Heads* since college and intends to use it to prove that SmashPhone can establish new unknown comic strips.

About Creators Syndicate

Los Angeles-based Creators Syndicate Inc. is the first successful independent syndicate in two decades and is only the second major independent founded since the 1930s. A multimillion-dollar corporation, Creators has been operating in the black since 1989, in spite of the tough

newspaper business climate. Creators provides popular comic strips such as *The Meaning of Lila*, *Girls & Sports*, *Liberty Meadows*, *Agnes, B.C.*, *Wizard of Id*, *Archie*, *Heathcliff*, and *Rugrats* to over 1,600 newspapers worldwide.

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