

THE BRIDLE TEAM WITH ANUPENDRA SHARMA ('87 E CO INSTRU)

# BRIDLE IT: MADE IN PILANI LABS!

BITS PILANI'S FIRST INCUBATED COMPANY TAKES AIM AT INDIA'S GROWING MOBILE MARKET



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**2004** marked a strategic milestone for the mobile industry. The number of mobile subscribers surpassed the total cable and satellite television subscribers in India, which number 40 million today. With 46 million mobile users, a number that is expected to double next year, the phenomenal mobile revolution in India has given rise to Bridle's idea.

## A PURE BITS START-UP!

Bridle management is pure Pilani. **Rama Krishna** ("Ramki, right") ('02 MMS, '05 ME Software Systems), a 10-pointer from BITS has won many international programming contests and national software development competitions. **Suneel Blewett** (left) ('00 BE (Hons) Comp Sci), and has worked in mobile networks, mobile handset designing and integration at Hughes Software Systems and Skyworks Inc. **Hari Krishnan** (center) ('02 MMS) has gained domain expertise at Hughes Software and Patni. He is a winner of several awards.

Bridle is a software company focused on creating mobile applications for the Indian market. Their ambitious mission is "**To touch every mobile subscriber in India, at least once a day**" by offering software applications initially in education, and later in healthcare and home appliances through the mobile phone.

Bridle's target segments touch everyone's lives, and its management team has been busy developing and launching a product for the education segment. The first product, **SchoolMATE (School Mobile Assisted TEacher)**, enables schools to communicate with parents through a communication suite that integrates into a full-fledged school management system. In urban India, it is very common these days for both parents to be working. Both parents typically have cell phones, and most likely don't use the internet at home. SMS via mobile phones is a well understood method of communicating in India. In a country where answering phones are not common and the home internet connection is rare, the cell phone has become the most important communication tool. Messaging



has become the cost-efficient and very effective alternative to email.

The SchoolMATE system is user-friendly and very easy to use. It allows parents to send messages to the school server, pulling down all the information about the child. Parents can request absence reports, fee payment reports, grades, illness, and truancy reports from the school. The number of students playing truant in movie theaters during school time gives parents a tempting reason to try and keep an eye on them.

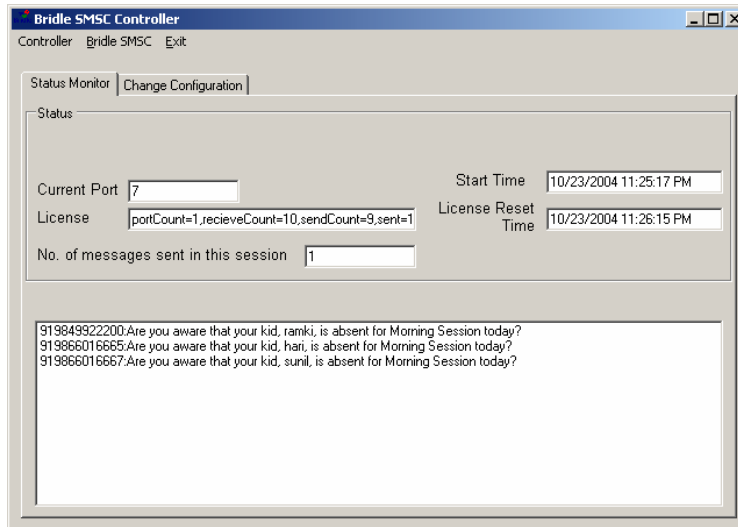
SchoolMATE is an instant hit in the early stages, with excellent reviews from pilot test customers. The system has a high level of security built into the software to ensure the software is not stolen. Piracy concerns remain the biggest threat to innovation in the Indian software industry.

SchoolMATE has focused its initial efforts on 6 states— AP, Maharashtra, MP, TN, Delhi and Karnataka at the moment, which offers a target market of 430,000 schools. AP is leading the market

with a plan to have computerized systems in 30,000 schools. The literacy rates and growth in IT usage in these states are outstanding. Since computerization in schools is a

as marketing. Bridle is confident that it is ahead of the market. International companies targeting the same space are **EduTxt**, **FastSMS** and **CSoft**. However, none of these companies have

on which SchoolMATE is running using the standard data-cable for that mobile (A data cable costs just Rs. 400-800 (\$10-20), depending on the model). Bridle's SchoolMATE automatically detects the phone on restart (just the app/service), and uses it for sending messages. The partnership with cell phone companies such as Airtel allows these messages to be sent out for less than 1 cent to each mobile user. So Bridle's SchoolMATE needs no internet and no extra hardware. There are no integration problems either since schools don't have full-fledged systems yet, except for simple billing systems at the moment which are easy to integrate.



new concept, take-up will be slow. Bridle management is forecasting revenues of Rs. 20 crores (\$4 million) in two years. Bridle has already partnered with India's largest mobile service provider, branded 'AirTel', where Bridle beat out a Middle Eastern international competitor. It is in conversations with other partners in India.



There are a few competitors in both spaces, and Bridle's management has spent considerable time analyzing their strategies and sizing up these companies. Competitors such as **Globals Inc.**, **Mobile Mantra** and **IMIMobile** are mimicking what some international companies have done. However, the competition has problems both in terms of their fundamental offering, as well

focused on India, and don't have the resources to enter India at the moment. If they don't move now, they will not pose a threat since moving first is critical in this space.

One problem the competition has is that their solutions need Internet connectivity, which is a big drawback at getting traction due to the low penetration rates of Internet in Indian schools. Bridle's solution uses the mobile phone attached to the PC for connectivity. In India, where mobile is well penetrated in the cities, no other medium gives instant connectivity and instant reach like the wireless network. This makes SchoolMATE a clearly superior product because it is does not depend on the unavailable internet, or an expensive, dedicated network.

Plus the market loves the ease of installation and usage. The software can be used by clicking setup from the CD, on any Windows NT, XP or 2000 machine. The school can connect a mobile phone to the PC/Server

Bridle is working on a number of other exciting products PilPal, Air2Blog and Voggi, which will be announced in the coming months.

The **BITS Technology Business Incubator** which is supporting Bridle's activities is proving to be an excellent foundation for Bridle. But it is not going to be sufficient. Money and expert management are both critical to taking Bridle to the next level. To accelerate the marketing efforts and to reach the target markets faster, Bridle is looking for an investment of approx. \$400,000. The money will be used to create entry barriers and widen the first mover advantages in the school management software segment through marketing and product development. Bridle is also looking for an able mentor with expertise in technology marketing, retailing and telecommunications who can guide them through the early phases.

For more information visit [www.bridleit.com](http://www.bridleit.com) or email the team at [ramki@bridleit.com](mailto:ramki@bridleit.com). You can also call Ramki on his cell at +91 98 499 22200 ♦