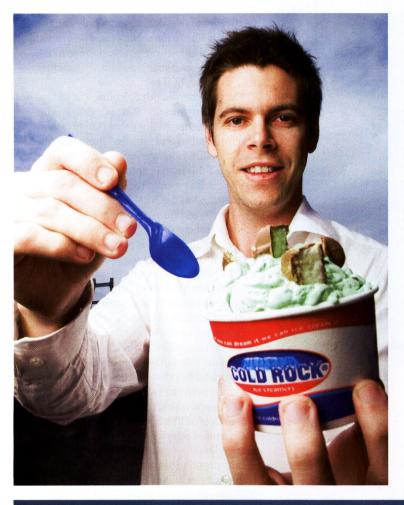Mobile call to action: Cold Rock Ice Creamery marketing manager Simon Stewart

Short and suite

The dramatic uptake of internet-enabled mobile phones has invigorated the idea of using them for commerce and location-based marketing. Report: Jeanne-Vida Douglas

● Ice-cream junkies will be carrying their mobile phones close to their hearts this summer as the Cold Rock Ice Creamery franchise launches a mobile internet marketing blitz along the east coast.

Having collected more than 20,000 mobile-phone numbers through its birthday club, the company began targeting ice-cream connoisseurs this month with offers using short message services connected to the Cold Rock website.

Marketing manager Simon Stewart says he will target customers through short messages, encourage them to visit the website through their mobile phones and enter their locations to find the closest Cold Rock Ice creameries.

"We'll send the offer out through SMS, with a link back to the website to encourage people to click through and check it out," Stewart says.

"The combination of mobile phone, website and location-based service lets us target people in a very specific way. This kind of campaign involves a very small outlay and can easily be integrated into the overall marketing strategy."

Mobile commerce, which combines SMS, mobile internet and location-based marketing, has been touted since mobile phones made their first attempts to connect with the internet.

Since May 2006, companies have been able to create mobile-specific web addresses using .mobi domain name. These were designed for the lower data transfer speeds associated with wireless internet connections as well as the processing speeds of the hardware on mobile phones.

The popularity of these .mobi domain names peaked late last year and has been falling as 3G mobile connectivity and high-end internet-enabled mobile phones become more broadly

available. As a result, many people are arriving at conventional websites from mobile platforms and finding it difficult to pinpoint information.

Internet-connection trends also suggest the market is rapidly picking up on mobile options. More than half of all new connections to the internet this year are phone-based packages, while mobile traffic to Google's search website has quintupled in the past two years, with countries other than the United States contributing 80 per cent of this increase.

"Clearly, the mobile web has arrived and it's now imperative that businesses have a mobile presence to reach the tens of millions of consumers searching on their phones," the global communications and public affairs manager for Google Australia, Deborah Singer, says.

The proliferation of internet-ready phones, reinvigorated by the release of Apple's iPhone, is forcing many companies to reconsider how their webpages are designed, the chief marketing officer of mobile internet development company m.Net, Scott Johnson says.

"There's a lot of people out there building specific mobile sites developed to give the customer the experience they are looking for from a mobile platform," he says. "The other option is to build a mobile extension to your existing website then use software that detects what technology people are using to connect to the web, and redirects them accordingly."

User-agent detection refers to technology that reveals which browser software customers are using to access the web. Johnson suggests companies ask their website developers to track such information through analytics packages to determine how people are coming to their websites in the first place.

"The reasons why people access the internet via their phone and via their desktop computer are very different," he says. "They'll usually do most of their research, product information and price comparisons at home on the desktop but go online through their mobile for contact information and immediate help to find something."

The rapid uptake of internet-ready mobile phones in the market represents a range of opportunities for location-based marketing as long as companies understand how their customers are using their mobile platforms, the co-founder and director for web development and marketing company Hyperfactory, Geoffrey Handley, says.

"A food retailer, for example, can publish recipes to their website, then give people the option of sending the shopping list to their mobile phone by SMS," Handley says. "A mobile strategy doesn't need to be big, hairy and expensive. It just needs to take the context into account." **BRW.**