

The long and short of messaging

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If the commercials for AT&T and Sprint wireless services that aired during the Olympics are any indication, short messaging service--exchange of text on cell phones, pagers, PDAs and other devices--might be in your future.

"The speed skating ads [AT&T] and the ski team in the tram [Sprint] are both awesome ads that got a ton of airtime," observed Jack Philbin, a young Evanston entrepreneur who is betting that wireless technology will be the next big thing, and that Chicago will be a major center for it. Philbin, 26, and Alex Campbell, 25, friends since kindergarten in New Canaan, Conn., moved here in August 1998 because they heard Chicago was the promised land for wireless. In fact, Mayor Daley last summer named wireless technology as one of the more promising areas for economic development in the Chicago area.

VibesMedia boasts 235 private communities, such as study groups or families, and 95 public groups.

VibesMedia dispatches between 3,000 and 5,000 messages a day. Before viewing messages from VibesMedia, users see an ad from such companies as Pizza Hut, H2O+, LobsterGram and local restaurants, clubs and salons.

VibesMedia won 2001 honors from BIGFrontier, the Chicago networking association, for the "BIGgest New Business Idea," beating out local wireless companies backed by Motorola Inc. and AOL Time Warner.

Steve Lundin, executive director of BIGFrontier, the Chicago technology networking group, said Philbin and Campbell "are acting on and delivering a business model that delivers potential new customers in a unique manner. They created an opportunity utilizing a wireless technology and married with a marketing need, based on their experiences within their own peer group."

