

## Vocel Gets Cash Infusion

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San Diego Business Journal Staff

Publishing firms are investing in San Diego-based cell phone developer Vocel, with the latest round of investment announced June 19.

The privately held Vocel declined to disclose the value of the investment, although it is the second investment offered jointly from publishers Torstar Corp. of Toronto and New York City-based Random House, Inc.

Torstar owns newspapers, led by the Toronto Star, as well as Harlequin Enterprises, which publishes women's fiction. Random House is a major consumer book publisher.

The investments allow Vocel to expand its portfolio of products to multiple carriers. The portfolio currently consists of 10 deployed or development-stage products used by 17 carriers worldwide.

Vocel Chief Executive Officer Carl Washburn said Random House invests in audible books to distribute content such as foreign language tutorials sold as books or cell phone applications.

"The phone allows you to keep track of your progress and allows you to hear how the words are pronounced," Washburn said. "Publishers are without question looking for alternative formats to distribute their content."

Random House also publishes a reference for prescription medication. Used on a cell phone, someone can see a picture of the pill, dosage information, its side effects and warnings.

"What the pill phone does is it actually sends you a reminder each time you need to take a pill," Washburn said. "Your phone is closed in

your pocket, then it rings, and you open it up and see a picture of the pill you take."

Other publishing applications include a children's book series, and cheats and codes for gamers.

Torstar's funding is fueling the development of Vocel's latest cell phone technology, called Interactive Commerce Accelerator, which lets mobile phone users purchase ring tones, screen wallpaper and games with a single click.

The system works in tandem with San Diego-based Qualcomm Inc.'s BREW solution and is being tested by subscribers of Midwest Wireless, a Mankato, Minn.-based carrier serving Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Washburn said the new system reduces the number of clicks to purchase a ring tone or game to one click from an average of 20 to 24 clicks, and reduces the length of the process to a few seconds from an average of two and a half minutes. Cell-phone carriers will be able to offer the system on any compatible cell phone device.

"Torstar is active in looking for new and exciting ways to extend our brands through digital delivery of content, and Vocel is leading the way in the mobile and wireless space," said Lorenzo DeMarchi, Torstar managing director of corporate development. "We have already partnered with Vocel to deliver the industry's first female targeted mobile content via Harlequin-To-Go on cell phones."

— Julie Gallant