

# Geek alert

In the first of a series on how small players use technology to cut cost, IRENE THAM checks out SMS alert promotions at cybercafe Geek Terminal

**RECESSIONARY** times call for creative measures – or technologies.

A new messaging tool has been key to eatery Geek Terminal's marketing campaign since last month.

And the cybercafe-cum-deli did it without the sting of exorbitant software and service charges.

"Every cent saved goes a long way," said Christopher Lee, co-founder and chief executive officer of the two-year-old joint in the financial district at Market Street.

This lifesaver is Fort Digital, a short message service (SMS) broadcast and customer relationship management (CRM) tool that has been in the market for the past year.

Geek Terminal's most recent promotion was for Valentine's Day, which ran for a week leading up to Feb 14. To alert customers to its \$99 dinner special for couples – comprising a three course meal, two glasses of wine and a heart-shaped Swarovski Crystal pendant – it sent out text messages to over 1,000 individuals in its customer database.

Recipients were asked to reply to the text message to indicate their interest, after which a Geek Terminal staff would follow up with a phone call to confirm the reservation.

"We called and asked which day they would be coming, so we could prepare the roses," said Christopher.

Should a customer's preferred dates be unavailable, the Geek Terminal staff would then suggest another date.



PHOTOS: JULIAN TAY FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

The whole campaign cost him only \$14, going by a charge of 1.4 cents per SMS alert. That excludes the one-time investment in the Fort Digital solution, which retails for \$899.

The alternative would have been to buy an ad-hoc package from an SMS broadcast service provider like Pacific Synergy.

But the company charges about 7 cents per SMS, which means Geek Terminal's Valentine's Day campaign would have cost \$70.

"Since we're going to run promotions throughout the year, it makes sense to invest in an SMS broadcast software. The savings from text messaging fees can add up over time," said Christopher.

He anticipates savings of \$500 to \$1,000 monthly when he sends messages to the 8,000 customers in the company's database, built from hosting over 360 events last year.

There is also no need to pay hefty licence fees for a CRM software, which may have advanced functions that are unnecessary at this point. The Fort Digital solution allows SMS responses from customers to be exported to an Excel spreadsheet for simple sorting and action planning.

For instance, in Excel, a staff can sort data by the

The solution comprises a computer software and a universal serial bus (USB) modem which has a SIM card reader. Users have to redeem their prepaid SIM cards from StarHub or SingTel. Each SIM card comes with 2,000 free SMS, the value of which has already been billed into the \$899 package price.

Geek Terminal, which opened for business in May 2007, is a popular destination for business meetings and corporate functions because the cafe has power plugs as well as printing, faxing and wireless broadband services.

Its customers get to surf wirelessly for free and its wireless broadband infrastructure supports up to 100 simultaneous connections.

The cybercafe has as its founders Christopher, his long-time buddy and certified barista Danny Pang and another friend. The trio could pool only \$300,000 in start-up capital. They were \$700,000 short.

However, the shortfall was offset by vendors ranging from Canon to Cisco Systems, which sponsored 80 per cent of the infrastructure costs at the surf-cum-work centre for road warriors.

In return, Geek Terminal acts as a mini-showroom for some of the coolest office technologies available.



Geek Terminal's chief executive officer Christopher Lee (left, with Fort Digital's director Teddy Tay) estimates that he will save \$500 to \$1,000 a month using the SMS broadcast service developed by local firm Fort Digital.