

Yo, ho ho! Local company goes after 'Pirates' deal

Burlingame's Limbo 41414 plans text messaging contest with movie, book tie-ins

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BURLINGAME — "Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End" was panned by critics, but that hasn't stopped it from raking in about \$275 million at the box office.

Now Limbo 41414, a Burlingame company that hosts bidding games on the Internet and on cell phones, is moving to capitalize on the popularity of the movie franchise, as well as the latest film and book releases from the Harry Potter canon.

Limbo 41414 has teamed up with The Walt Disney Co. and Verizon Wireless to give away \$100,000 in prizes and tickets for two to a party in Los Angeles aboard the Black Pearl, the pirate ship helmed by Captain Jack Sparrow in the three "Pirates" films.

The company, at 270 East Lane, also will be offering a signed copy of J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix" to coincide with the release this summer of the film adaptation of the book and Rowling's final installment in the Potter series, "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows."

Stacy Geagan Wagner, the company's vice president of marketing and public relations, said Limbo signed Disney and Verizon as advertisers, while the Harry Potter campaign is a piece of viral marketing — a bid to tap into Potter "pandemonium" and boost the company's public profile.

The more people play Limbo's games, the more allure the company will have for advertisers, Wagner said. The company also is betting that consumers will learn to trust the Limbo brand when they see it coupled with corporate heavyweights, from Disney to Proctor and Gamble Co.

"We want to create a community of people who are interested in having fun and winning these prizes, so advertisers will want to come in and talk to our community," Wagner said.

Limbo's games are basically sweepstakes. Mobile phone owners send and receive text messages to place "bids" on products like iPods, handbags and even luxury cars. The lowest unique number entered for a specific prize wins. The numbers are arbitrary and do not correspond to actual sums of money.

Joe Laszlo, a senior analyst for JupiterResearch, which surveys the technology industry, said Limbo, which was founded in 2005, seeks to take advantage of the increasing number of people who use text messaging to communicate.

A JupiterResearch study from April suggested that about 40 percent of consumers with cell phones regularly send text messages to friends, Laszlo said.

Only 4 percent of those surveyed said they had sent a text message to participate in a contest or sweepstakes in the past year, which indicates that business-consumer text messaging is still in its infancy, Laszlo said. He pointed to "American Idol" as one of the most prominent examples of contests that employ text messaging.

Limbo and other companies may benefit from technological advances that are making mobile phones more sophisticated, Laszlo acknowledged. The next big thing in cell phones, Apple Inc.'s iPhone, arrives in stores June 29.

"As phones get richer, there are only more and more opportunities for companies to deliver information and entertainment services to the people that carry them," Laszlo said.

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