

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Zippity-doo-da

New service allows students to be in tune with events, specials at local venues

By Amber Gray
THE BATTALION

During the week, choosing which scene to make an appearance at can be difficult for many students, but for James Bondi, the decision just got a lot easier.

"One of the quickest decisions I've made was to stop by Fox and Hound the other night," said Bondi, a senior physics major. "I had happy hour all night. Who wouldn't take advantage of such a promotion?"

VIPzip Central Inc. is a new marketing technique using an online promotions engine that allows members to receive specials and information about businesses they choose. Exclusive VIPzip messages can be delivered to a person's cell phone, PDA, e-mail or any other Internet-enabled device of his choice.

"Text messaging is about to become a huge market," said Michael McMillen, a senior business management major and regional executive account manager for VIPzip. "This service is a completely new and innovative marketing technique geared to what individuals want."

For an easier explanation of VIPzip, McMillen suggested comparing the service to radio. While the radio is free to its listeners, VIPzip members receive free "tickets," ranging from drink specials to coupons for free food. Similar to how advertisers sponsor radio programs through commercials, businesses are paying VIPzip for promotions, he said.

"Only with VIPzip, advertisers are reaching its targeted audience," McMillen said. "And consumers are only receiving promotions and information from the businesses they choose to hear from."

Consumers create an account online to choose how and when to receive informational and promotional messages from the businesses they select.

"VIPzip filters out the advertisements you don't want, while allowing you to choose when and if to respond to them," said Josh Cunningham, a sophomore business management major whose father created VIPzip. "The service offers a universal gateway for businesses and consumers to communicate."

Over the next few months, the company hopes to sign up as many businesses and industries as possible to reach a more diverse audience.

"From restaurants to golf courses, VIPzip wants to get anybody and everybody in the entertainment industry involved," Cunningham said.

Recently, The Groove and Fox & Hound joined the service, promoting local entertainment information as well as daily incentives and specials for members. Additional businesses using the service are Outback Pub and the Rhythm Room in Houston.

"This is a good way to educate people about what's happening during the week," said Steven Wright, Fox and Hound's general manager. "We hope to get more people in during lunch and bring in new faces every night of the week."

Wright said the pub had toyed around with the idea of sending promotions through an e-mail list, but was concerned with the public's fears of spam and selling their information.

"VIPzip seems to use better technology and an easier communication tool," Wright said. "I think giving the customers the ability to choose the marketing they want to receive is a good idea."

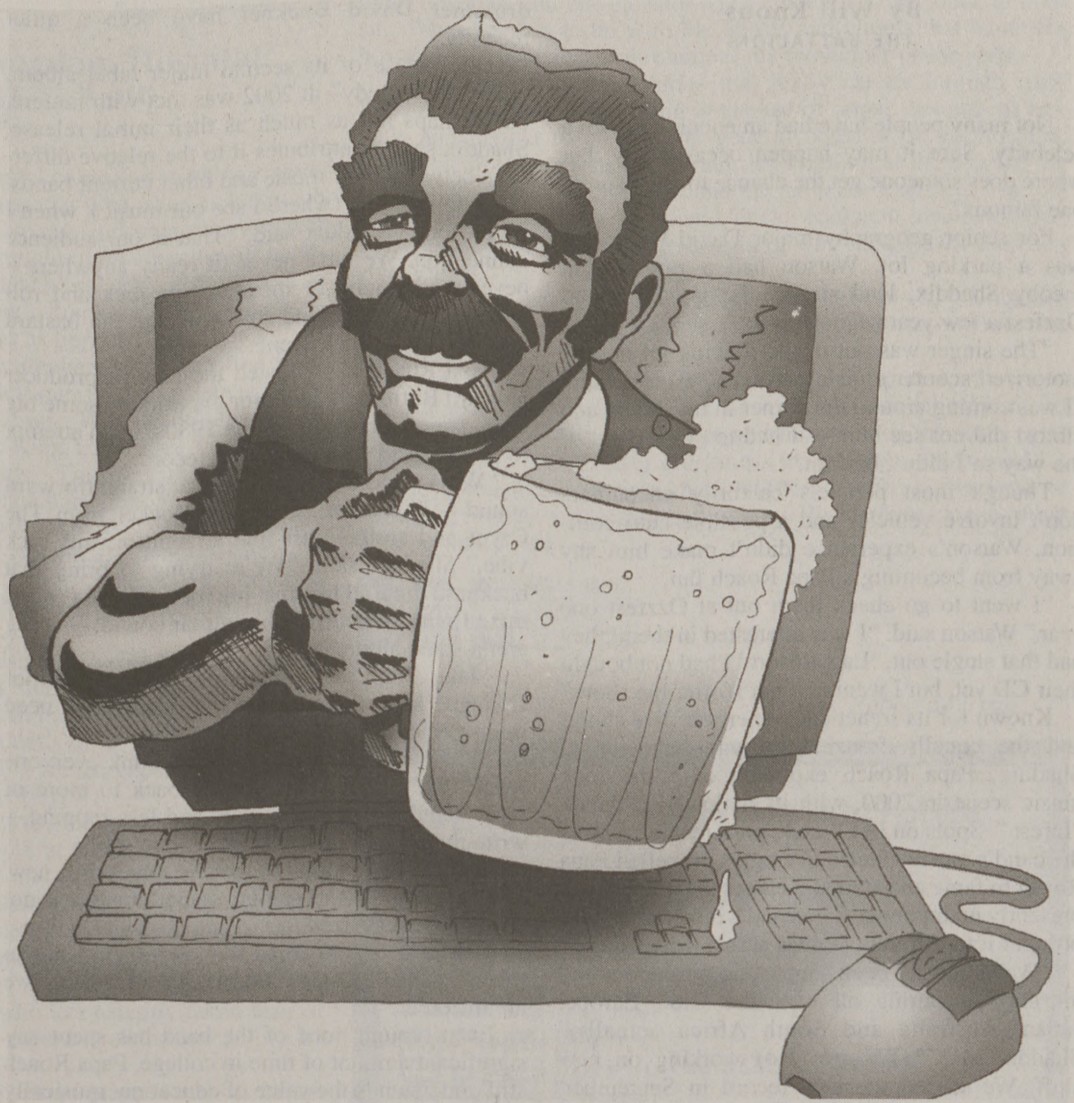
With a 60-40, male-female clientele at Fox and Hound and similar statistics at most other bars, it can be expected that more men will be using the service — at least at first.

"Whenever I'm out, I usually take advantage of the promotions," Bondi said. "The more specials and deals I receive, the less money I have to spend."

In addition to those promotions, VIPzip offers information on bands and other entertainment events occurring around town.

"VIPzip allows bands a communication portal with their fans," McMillen said. "Text messaging allows individuals to receive performance and event information about their favorite bands easier and more conveniently."

In the near future VIPzip hopes to add other Northgate businesses to its list of clientele. Cunningham said the next main goal for VIPzip is to get into other markets as soon as possible.



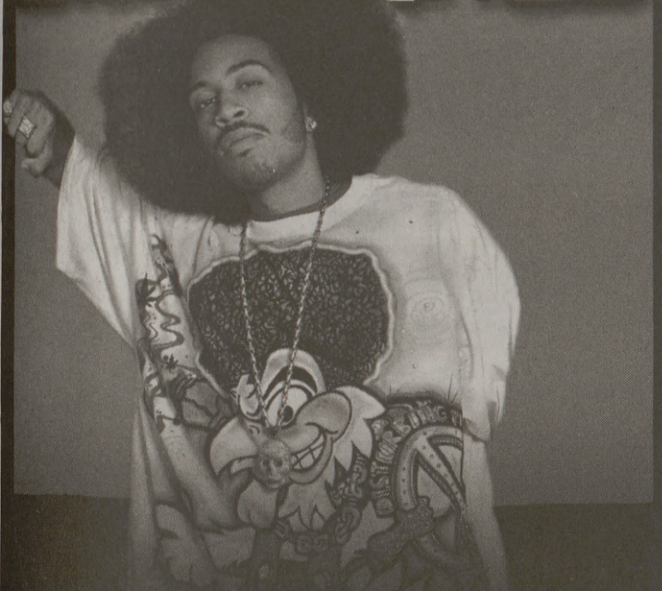
CHRIS GRIFFIN • THE BATTALION

"In six months, we hope to be in the 13 most local areas," he said. "And eventually we want to be nation- and even worldwide."

Cunningham said the company is growing through word of mouth.

"I've told a lot of my friends about it, to get them set-up with the deals I receive," Bondi said.

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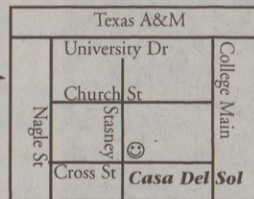
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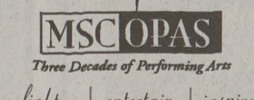
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