

Numbers looking good for Mobile Mentor

DENIS O'SHEA hasn't really been hit by the economic downturn. His company, Mobile Mentor, which teaches mobile phone users how to work their handsets, hired 23 people last month as it continues to outgrow the New Zealand market.

"The mobile industry seems to be weathering the financial storm quite well," said O'Shea, "and the industry is introducing new products at a hell of a rate, so the complexity is growing, as is the opportunity to generate revenues."

O'Shea, a former Nokia executive, started Mobile Mentor in 2004 after noticing the increasing complexity of



mobile phones was becoming a problem for customers. With Vodafone as a contract partner, O'Shea offered one-on-one tutorials to the telco's

customers – the service was free to the end user and Vodafone picked up the tab, seeing it as a way to add value.

It proved a winning formula and O'Shea has expanded overseas, securing contracts with Telstra in Australia and Telecom Italia Mobile in Brazil. The attractions for telcos were laid out in a Telstra investor day meeting last year, where the company revealed that its mentored customers were more satisfied, used 1.5 times more data and bought 66% more browsing packs.

Most of Mobile Mentor's new hires last month were in Australia,

said O'Shea. "I was very clear from the beginning that the New Zealand market was too small.

"But it's a place where you can innovate and make mistakes on a small scale."

With Brazil and Australia up and running, "we're building a pilot in the UK, which is going well. We're looking at Canada and we've signed a licensing deal with a consortium in South Africa".

The company says revenue has grown 163% year on year and 80% now comes from its overseas contracts.

"It's going to be another year

before we're profitable across the group because we're doing so much development work," said O'Shea. The company has just completed a placement to existing shareholders to tide it over until the profit starts to flow.

It's a challenge being a small Kiwi company trying to take on the world, said O'Shea, "but we're getting traction now and there are opportunities we need to grab with both hands".

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