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Telecoms firm back with a Smart new marketing strategy

By Catherine O'Mahony

With a €90 million recapitalisation now behind it, Smart Telecom is dusting off its marketing strategy.

But the telecoms brand that used to punch well above its weight in marketing will be taking a very different approach as it chases its new goal of a modest 4 per cent share of the market. Before its dramatic collapse in 2006, the phone and broadband company was spending upwards of €1 million a year on sponsoring mass market properties such as the TV3 Weather Forecast and the Rose of Tralee.

That's being replaced by a much lower-key approach, under the guidance of its new

sales and marketing director Ray O'Brien, a former executive with UPC.

The company is gearing up to run a series of small campaigns in the fourth quarter of the year, covering direct mail, print advertising, online promotions and possibly sponsorship of selected events.

But, since Smart Telecom's key propositions are now directed toward the corporate and small to medium enterprise markets, costly mass market promotions are not in the plans.

"The key thing we need to get across is that Smart Telecom is back and it's alive," said O'Brien.

"There are some people out there who think Smart Telecom went out of business. We need to adopt a much more targeted approach to the SME market and make it our busi-

ness to target those customers directly," O'Brien said the company took external advice about the branding of the business and decided to stick by the Smart Telecom brand, despite the publicity that accompanied its demise in 2006.

"People still had a lot of fondness for the name and felt there was nothing inherently bad about the company. What happened was that it tried, and failed. Creating a whole new brand would have cost an awful lot of money and we didn't need to do it."

Despite its difficulties, Smart Telecom has retained about 200 corporate clients who use its broadband services (but generally not its voice-based services), as well as some SME and residential clients. It has a total of 28,000 'revenue generating units' (units represent holders of one of three

core products.) It is focusing on cross-selling these products to the existing base as well as seeking new customers. Its offering to residential customers will in future be limited to major urban areas, since it operates exclusively using its own network, rather than via Eircom.

O'Brien kicks off his first Smart Telecom press campaign this month. It will be, he said, very matter of fact and product-driven. "We're just saying to people: 'here's what we have to offer, we've a wholly new network, so just consider it.'"

He refuses to be critical of the marketing strategy that Smart Telecom used to follow. "If they'd achieved what they wanted to do, it would have been brilliant," he said.

"So since they ran into a brick wall, it was misguided? It's wrong for me to judge."



Ray O'Brien, new sales and marketing director, Smart Telecom