

Virgin Mobile launches in Poland, eyes Russia, Turkey

WARSAW, POLAND: Billionaire Richard Branson's Virgin Mobile on Wednesday launched operations in Central Europe offering a prepaid service in Poland and aims to expand its mobile telephony presence in the region.

"Virgin Mobile Central and Eastern Europe is a new regional company in the Virgin group. We are looking into expanding our business into Poland obviously but also potentially to Turkey, Russia, Hungary and others," Kristian Myrup, head of Virgin Mobile Central and Eastern Europe told reporters in Warsaw on Wednesday.

Virgin becomes the third global brand on the competitive Polish mobile market, following Deutsche Telecom's T-mobile which controls 28% of the market and France Telecom's Orange which commands 29%.

Branson's Virgin enters the game as the fifth player in Poland overall and company officials hope to capture at least a million pre-paid clients within three years, company officials said.

The Plus mobile operator holds 28% of the market, while Play pre-paid has 14.6%, according to market research presented Wednesday by the Warsaw-based Audytel analysts.

There are over 53.1 million active mobile phones in Poland, a country of 38.2 million people.

Analysts at Arc researchers also found that about 25% of pre-paid customers - or some six million users - were open to changing their pre-paid operator if they were offered a better deal.

Virgin Mobile is one of around 400 companies comprising the Virgin Group owned by the British tycoon Branson, 62, who is expected to visit Poland later this year.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge