

Cherrypicks finds way into mainland market with navigation service

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Massive investment in mainland airports is opening up opportunities for companies such as Cherrypicks, which offers navigation services to help travellers find their way around cavernous hubs.

Founded in 2000 by Jason Chiu, Cherrypicks has developed the Starbeacon system that will soon support augmented reality features at the Hong Kong airport, where users can point their smartphones at a sign and have the text translated into their preferred language.

The company will also deploy the service at the airport in Fuzhou, and is in talks to introduce it at other mainland airports.



Jason Chiu

Besides helping the lost and weary find their way around, the software also allows companies to track data such as passenger flows and customer shopping habits, including how much time spent at a store.

“The technology allows us to collect massive location data for more intelligent service features and location insights,” Chiu said at a forum yesterday.

Cherrypicks was acquired last year by NetDragon Websoft Holdings, an online gaming and mobile internet firm.

The mainland plans to build 136 airports by 2025 as part of investments to improve its infrastructure and cement its position as a major global aviation hub.

Construction is under way for a US\$12.9 billion airport in Beijing, which spans 47 square kilometres and is expected to be the world’s biggest when it opens in 2019.

Globally, the indoor location market is expected to reach almost US\$41 billion by 2022, with Asia-Pacific expected to be the fastest-growing region over the next five years, according to a report published by research firm MarketsandMarkets.

Other companies that provide indoor navigation services include Finland’s IndoorAtlas, which received US\$10 million investment from Chinese search engine operator Baidu in 2014.

Apart from airports, Starbeacon can also be used in underground railway stations, malls and office buildings.

MTR Corp has worked with Cherrypicks to deploy Starbeacon in shopping malls and at the Admiralty interchange station to send out station alerts and indoor navigation.

Chiu said the company was in talks to expand its coverage to other stations.

Other places that use Cherrypicks’ indoor location tracking and data analytics include Lee Gardens and Taikoo Place.

The Fuzhou airport service is not the company’s first foray into the mainland. It failed in its first attempt to introduce a social media platform and lost HK\$200 million because the market was not yet mature.

Chiu said he hoped to spin off the company in the next three years and go for an initial public offering in Hong Kong.