

The best of both worlds

Now that we're officially part of Vodafone, perhaps it's time to warn you: we at Vodafone Czech Republic are a little different.

You can see it the moment you enter our Prague headquarters. Never mind the dance music (sorry, we'll turn that down), the music videos on the monitors, or the aquarium in the corner – we have a 'tie check', where our first Vodafone visitors were held hostage at reception until they relinquished their neckwear.

We train our customer reps with experiences like speed dating and filmmaking; we hold the Czech record

for the most handshakes in 20 minutes. We launch voice services by filling local pubs with foam; we test data services by recruiting armies of hackers to tear them apart. Our management has conducted press conferences dressed up as bikers and company events as DJs. Our 2004 annual report has the word 'love' splashed across the cover.

But here's the best bit: we're a perfect match for Vodafone.

Velvet revolution to bubble wrap

The Czech Republic is an industrious and adaptive nation facing the challenge of catching up with the West after 40

years of communism. It is a country of contradictions, where baroque architecture sits next to Soviet prefabs and beer is cheaper than water.

When we started up in 2000, the market had already been divided between the former state-owned telecom and an international heavyweight. We had no network, no stores, and a CEO whose office doubled as a broom cupboard, but to win our licence we committed to putting a mobile phone into the hand of every Czech citizen.

What we lacked in resources we made up for with innovation. We offered our consumer customers post-paid services without contracts or activation fees, as well as all-day flat rates and rollover minutes from month to month. We even did away with third-party retailers, relying on Inside Sales to get customers, and Direct Delivery to get them phones.

Within months we were the fastest-growing third operator in central Europe. We extended our signal coverage to 98 per cent of the population, completing the fastest network launch in GSM history – a feat that left our suppliers, Ericsson and Siemens, in need of some rest.

Then we started making our brand into one of the most admired and respected on the Czech market. We sponsored a new IMAX theatre, and sent our employees out with free tickets to reward local businesses with good customer service skills. We published the largest lifestyle magazine in the country and distributed it through our stores. A local rock band wrote a song about us, incorporating our people into the music video.

One day in July 2004, a surprise awaited residents slogging their way to work across Nuselsky Most, a 485-meter bridge that looms 40 meters over Prague. We covered this monolith of communist architecture in bright red bubble wrap

– providing proof to our trademark claim: 'We're obsessed with coverage'.

We were the first to offer a dual-band network, prepaid roaming, mobile and ATM payments, and online e-business. For five years we've been winning awards for best employer, best advertising, best company magazine, best mobile operator, most dynamic company, and mobile operator of the year.

This year, just as the Czech hockey team won the world championship, we joined a winning team of our own: Vodafone.

We want to be the best. We've made a mark on this market, but have yet to make the market ours. We can achieve that by combining our passion and enthusiasm with Vodafone's advanced products, extensive resources, solid support and strong leadership.

And it's not a one-way street. With all we're learning from Vodafone, we're also hoping to infect you all with our sense of humour, recharge you with our start-up spirit, inspire you with our passion for the brand... and give you the best we've got.

We look to apply our signature inventiveness and innovation to the high-value products and services in the Vodafone offering. We hope to compare notes about our internal feedback and performance management techniques.

We want to share our success in creating an exciting brand experience, not just for our customers, but for our people as well. Most of all, we're dying to discover whether the 2,000 of us can make a better experience for the 60,000 of you.

One way or another, we're as excited about new discoveries, opportunities and successes as you are. While we may seem to live in a world of our own, one thing's for certain: we're thrilled to be a part of yours.

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Key:

- Vodafone local operating companies in Europe
- Vodafone affiliates in Europe
- Vodafone partners in Europe

Fastfacts:

- Vodafone completed the acquisition of 100 per cent of the share capital of Oskar Mobil a.s. in the Czech Republic on 31 May 2005
- Vodafone Czech Republic is the country's third mobile operator behind Eurotel and T-Mobile
- Customers: 1.97 million (at 31 July 2005)



Andrea Linhartová Palánová, Manager, Employee Marketing, left, and Zora Sulíková Něměčková, Senior Specialist, Employee Marketing, enjoy the 'Paint it Red' event, where people used red paint to express how they felt about joining the Vodafone family