

tokyo journal

With ADSL fees as low as they can go, our correspondent J Mark Lytle is one of the many far east consumers enjoying budget broadband connections. Another popular trend is sharing digital images over mobile phones, though just be careful what you send . . .

We all know that life out here in the future (well, nine hours ahead of GMT) is such splendid fun, but what about life online in Japan? As mentioned last month, NTT DoCoMo has already beaten the rest of the world to the punch and launched a 3G (third-generation) mobile phone service. But Japanese users don't need any faster-than-a-speeding-bullet wireless data service to get themselves, and each other, into hot water.

Lesson to be learnt . . .

Taking the latest craze for digital camera-equipped mobiles a little too far, Tadahiro Hamagawa of Tokyo ended up with a slight problem with overexposure. In fact, he was arrested recently and charged with criminal defamation of a 25-year-old woman from Oita in western Japan. Hamagawa had met the woman online last summer, making her his *meru tomo* (email penpal) and then persuading her to buy a mobile phone capable of sending and receiving digital snaps.

When she started to receive pictures of the 39-year-old Hamagawa in his birthday suit, she was so overwhelmed she just had to reciprocate. However, things turned nasty several months later when the woman refused to leave her husband, at which point the charming Hamagawa-san set up a website to share the woman's indiscretions with the world. Before having his collar felt, Hamagawa had managed to draw 650 voyeurs to his online scrapbook of a failed love affair. Digicam mobiles should hit the UK next summer – you have been warned.

ADSL free-for-all

British punters struggling to get to grips with BT's notoriously inefficient rollout of ADSL high-speed internet connections might cast an envious eye towards the east. Led by Yahoo Japan, a price war has been raging for the last few months, resulting in monthly ADSL charges of as little as £10 (in the UK prices are around £40). With free installation and subsidised ADSL modems, the consumer is in the driving seat for now. But things can't stay rosy forever – broadband prices are likely to rise eventually, though only after a Darwinian shake-up of the competition and a few high-profile casualties.

Personally, I hedged my bets and opted for a completely free domestic ISDN line, with miniscule monthly charges. This was offered by NTT in a desperate attempt to convince the public that the billions of yen it invested in a national ISDN network wasn't money down the drain. Maybe I could play games using it...

Name of the game

October's 2001 Autumn Tokyo Game Show was the last before the projected February launch here of Microsoft's Xbox, so the mood was fairly subdued. Nintendo's GameCube drew plaudits, while there were lots of interesting Java-based games for mobile phones.

My personal award for the 'why, oh why, would anyone want to do that?' game of the show has to go to the revitalised Sega's innovative *inu no o-sanpo* (honourable dog walking). Yes, it is an arcade simulation of – ahem – taking your dog for a walk. To save you asking, the pixellated pooch does everything a real dog does – and that means everything. Perhaps Sega's designers used a little too much realism this time.



↑ Microsoft's GameCube (above) is still eagerly awaited; Nintendo's GameCube (top) is doing well in the meantime, as are 3G digital camera-equipped mobile phones (right)

Who's that girl?

3G mobile phones were uncharacteristically low profile at this year's autumn show, apart from one conspicuously popular booth. This was showing DoCoMo's demo of how to exchange video clips with a striking young lady: we take it Mr Hamagawa wasn't involved. ■

