

# Islam Calling

■ Driving home from work around prayer time but not quite sure if it's started yet? Let your mobile phone call to the rescue! **Magda Ali** speaks to Nasser Ahmed about spreading the gift of the Adhan.



For some it's a daily occurrence; for others it's a rarity, but everyone has done it at some point in time: missed one, two, maybe even three of the daily prayers because you were either "too busy with work" or simply because you weren't sure of the time. If only someone or something would remind you on a daily basis! Well look no further than past the end of your mobile phone, because thanks to Nasser Ahmed, it's where the solution to all your prayer-missing problems lie. For most of us, our mobile phones are a gateway to keeping track of our ever burgeoning social world, but for Nasser Ahmed, it held the medium through which prayer times could be sent to one and all. And therein the concept of MyAdhan was born.

"Mobile phones have tremendous potential to be used for the purposes of increasing the awareness of Islam and MyAdhan hopes that the services it provides can help Muslims develop their faith by using technology," says Nasser, a Computer Science graduate who, with his audacious nature and enthusiasm recognised a gap in the industry and launched his company in 2004. "There was a massive opportunity to help Muslims nurture their Islamic responsibilities using a prayer alert service. MyAdhan's focus is on using technology to make it easier to apply Islam in everyday life, allowing

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each individual to go at his or her pace in the development of their faith.” The tying of faith in God with modern technology is something Nasser clearly feels strongly about. “We have to try using different techniques and approaches to revive our faith in ourselves, families, communities and beyond,” he states passionately. “We should be proud to be Muslims and make the intention to do something about our faith today.”

In an effort to establish the feasibility of his vision, Nasser set up a prototype whereby he could begin sending local mosque prayer times to his mobile phone. After realising that prayer times differ from mosque to mosque and from city to city, he began working on a computer programme that could calculate prayer times dynamically. Within a few months, a fully functional system was running that could send out prayer times to any mobile phone based on an SMS request (using postcodes) sent to the phone connected to Nasser’s computer. “I began using the service my-

self and became my first customer,” he recalls with a laugh. “It was only when other people began to ask me about the prayer times that were appearing on my phone that I realised there was a potential market for the service.”

It was in researching whether the move from theoretical ‘potential’ market to a real product that MyAdhan.com came into being. “I decided to call it MyAdhan because I wanted to capture the essence of a ‘personal calling’, which when you look at the Adhan is the perfect exemplification,” says Nasser. “Everyone has their own personal calling to Islam and that is what I wanted to highlight. The first version of the website was purely a market research experience to see if people would want to use my prayer time alert service. I couldn’t afford to quit my job to work on this full time, and we didn’t actually have a product either – the system running from my bedroom wouldn’t have been able to service more than a few people.” Yet, MyAdhan was to move on to bigger places than Nasser’s bedroom space. Deciding to tackle not just the UK but a global market, he was soon inundated with 50,000 pre-registrations after just a few months of operation. The true magnitude of the endeavour was something that could no longer be dismissed. “It gave me a lot of confidence that such a market existed, bearing in mind the mobile phone market back then was nowhere near to as mature as it is now,” admits Nasser. “Colour screens, cameras, video and MP3 music were things of the future.”

And MyAdhan was set to have a share in that future. Since November 2006, MyAdhan has sent out over 500,000 prayer and fasting time alerts: a large testament to an enterprise all built on the beep of a phone. “It’s about giving that gentle nudge to make people say, ‘Hey Mr/Mrs Busy Person, prayer is important’.” In addition to this, we’ve also launched other services like wallpapers, Qur’an/Adhan MP3 downloads, authentic Hadith and Qur’an subscription, event updates and also a mosque locator. As well as this, we have been working heavily with charities on a Text2Donate scheme.” Nasser’s journey to success however has not been a smooth one. One of the biggest challenges in starting a technology business is knowing when something is ready for consumer use: months of testing, re-testing and perfecting your product can still mean it never makes it onto the market. “I spent a whole year preparing the prayer times service along with a new website and it wasn’t until June 2005 that we relaunched the MyAdhan service on the Islam Channel,” recalls Nasser. “Three hours before going on the show I remember checking and altering codes and scripts to make sure things were working. The last thing I wanted to do was create something that didn’t work and look like a fool on TV. The launch went smoothly though and it is only when the masses are let loose on a product that you realise no product can be 100% perfect at its launch. It takes a strong will to freeze a project and not let features creep in.”

Now with MyAdhan aiming to broaden its brand across America and Europe, the company is set to become a leader in its field. But while it goes head to head with providers like Google and Yahoo who are pushing into mobile search, content and services, the ethos of the company lies centred on faith. “MyAdhan is just my way of using the talent and opportunities God has given me to do some good for the community,” professes Nasser. “It’s a double reward to be earning a living whilst doing something positive.” With a motto of “Your intelligent call to Islam”, MyAdhan is definitely making some clever moves into this new market. ● [www.myadhan.com](http://www.myadhan.com)