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Telecom Takes First Tie With Title of Toronto Stage

Year-old Norigen Communications Group, Inc. made its first foray into sponsorship this month, signing 10-year title of the main stage at Toronto's Harbourfront Centre.

The company, which provides telephony to small and medium-sized businesses, hopes its link with a major venue in the center of Canada's biggest city will position it as a player. "We are a downtown-centric phone company, so we want to be visible in the downtown corridors where we do business," said Eva Innes, director of corporate communications, who spearheaded the tie. Top management signed off.

Like other young high-tech players that have inked venue titles, Norigen also hopes the sponsorship will lend the company a perception of permanence. "This is a company that has grown tremendously. We wanted to put our stake in the ground and tell people we're here to stay," Innes said.

Norigen will pay a seven-figure sum over the life of the deal, said Judy Haber, senior partner at Performance Sponsorship Group, which sold the tie.

The deal comes as Norigen is shifting most of its promotional efforts out of ads and into direct marketing; Harbourfront lets it maintain a high profile as it expands beyond the nine cities in which it conducts business now. "We needed to have an initiative that gives us ongoing visibility and brand exposure," Innes said.

As part of the agreement, Norigen will be exclusive telecom seller to Harbourfront for the life of the deal; the company gets exclusivity throughout the telecom category.

The tie also afforded a serendipitous link between Norigen's "One Source" marketing tag, and the venue's tagline, "One place in the world. The world in one place," which Harbourfront uses to tout its varied entertainment offerings. "Our mandate is to connect Canada to the world and the world to Canada," said Ann Brookes, the venue's director of marketing and development. "We really wanted to work with someone in the technology category that could help us make that connection."

Harbourfront draws about three million attendees per year, Brookes said. To help bolster year-round presence, the package also includes title of Harbourfront's event line, which logs about 100,000 calls per year, she said.

Norigen will demonstrate products and services from on-site kiosks; the company also will use the tie for client entertainment, both for customers of Norigen and NCG's IT services subsidiary, Compugen, said Innes.

Harbourfront's other year round sponsors include Dairy Farmers of Ontario, du Maurier Ltd., Labatt Breweries of Canada, Natrel and PepsiCo, Inc.