

Netpower bags US\$150m deal

It will deploy largest wireless LAN in China, based on tech used here

By **ROLAND LIM**

NETPOWER International has won a US\$150 million contract from Chinese Internet service provider Great Wall Broadband Network Service (GWBN) to deploy what is touted to be the largest wireless local area network (LAN) in China.

Wireless LANs, also known as wireless hotspots, enable users with a suitably equipped notebook or personal digital assistant, and a valid subscription with the ISP, to get on-line.

The contract — Netpower's biggest so far — will enable wireless Internet access for GWBN customers at more than 4,000 locations by the end of 2008. GWBN currently offers fixed-line broadband access and is also one of the larger Internet cafe operators in China.

The wireless LAN project will start in the first quarter of 2006 in Wuhan, where major hotels, commercial buildings and universities will be covered. Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Chengdu will follow.

When completed, GWBN customers will be able to get roaming Internet access at hotspots in all these cities.

As part of the contract, Netpower will be responsible for the hardware and software aspects of the project, including deploying

its NetZone wireless software solution.

“This solution will allow GWBN to introduce new revenue-generating services, increase its customer base and provide a platform for growth in wireless mobility and connectivity,” said Netpower chief executive officer Alan Matthews.

The wireless hotspots that Netpower will deploy will be based on existing IEEE 802.11g technology — as used in Singapore.

Netpower operates in Singapore and Malaysia and has started to expand into the Philippines and Indonesia, but a spokesman said that China is the main focus.

China is expected to have the greatest number of Internet users in the world. According to the China Internet Network Information Centre, as at June this year, China had an Internet penetration rate of 7.9 per cent — equivalent to 103 million users. And this is expected to grow to 120 million by year-end.