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The Mobile World has completed its Q1 09 survey of the global mobile industry. Mobile customer growth has continued over the nine months since the beginning of the current recession, albeit at a reduced rate. The Mobile World Database shows a March 09 total of 4.155bn connections worldwide, up from 4.007bn at the end of December 2008. Global penetration now stands at 61.7%, up 2.0% on the year end figure and 9.2% over the last twelve months.

A total of 147m new customers connected during the quarter, compared to 152m in the same quarter of 2008. The vast majority of the new connections came in the developing world, with Asia and Africa together accounting for all but 21m of the quarter's total. By contrast, the industrialised markets of Europe and North America experienced their lowest growth rate for over a decade, with Europe adding just one million new connections, as network operators took the opportunity to disconnect inactive accounts. We expect that the June quarter will show a total of between 4.20-4.25 billion, with 4.45-4.50bn in prospect by the year end.

John Tysoe, Co-founder and principal analyst at The Mobile World commented:

"The picture that has emerged this quarter is more positive than we could have expected six months ago. There are some weak spots in the market, especially in the developed world, but this was still the ninth best quarter ever. It helps confirm our view that while the telecommunications industry may not be recession proof, it is holding up well during difficult times. The continuing rapid rate of technological development and the resumption of international M&A activity are also positive indicators."

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