



Find it... Get it... Use it... 2009 is the year of the Mobile Application Storefronts

SurfKitchen's CEO, Michel Quazza looks ahead to a week at Mobile World Congress and key trends for the coming year.

Mobile World Congress kicks off next week - attracting some 50,000 attendees to the Fira in Barcelona. It's the world's largest trade show for the mobile industry and provides a stimulating, insightful congress - bringing together industry leaders, equipment vendors as well as Internet and entertainment professionals. A perfect environment to conduct business, network and experience the hottest trends in mobile communications.

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive - given the economic climate - that 2009 is fast becoming the year of the mobile Internet. As I predict we'll witness at Mobile World Congress (MWC) next week - it's undoubtedly the year of the mobile Internet application storefront.

Over the past two years mobile data services have evolved from a fairly limited portfolio of content on offer, to an increasing variety of mobile Internet applications and services for users to choose from. Flat rate data tariffs, network advancements and the increasing popularity of devices like the iPhone have shifted operator focus away from improving their so called 'walled garden' or WAP services - and placed it squarely on offering users an environment which encourages them to easily find, personalise and enjoy using an array of mobile Internet applications and services. Anything from games, productivity and fun applications, music, news, streaming TV, weather, sport, movies and more.

Whilst undoubtedly tough market conditions exist, one cannot ignore the fact that consumers continue to demand - and pay for - an upgraded experience on their phones. It's these very market conditions one could argue that will encourage operators to provide the vast majority of users on mass market phones with the same superb user experience that iPhone advocates have enjoyed. When billions of people carry mobile phones with them every hour of every day, you have an established infrastructure for information and business revolution, which is yet to be tapped.

Even if users are reigning in spending, longer handset renewal cycles don't necessarily bode ill for operators. The fact that the majority of consumers may hold onto their faithful handsets just a little longer does not in itself present a significant problem for operators as far as data revenue is concerned - as long as the right service offering is in place. Recent developments in the market have proven that providing users with a great user experience leads to a significant

uplift in mobile Internet usage. SurfKitchen's Mobile Internet Platform – which will make its debut at MWC – is designed to enable operators deliver a really intuitive, personalised experience for their subscribers right across the broadest range of phones. At a time when operators are striving to add value to their network, it's critical that they offer a compelling user experience to consumers in order to drive mobile internet service usage and be a source of competitive differentiation.

Application stores are designed with one key objective in mind; encouraging users to purchase services on their phone. Simple enough concept, but the reality is, unless the experience is made easy, intuitive – not to mention enjoyable – for users, they'll give up. Fast. Vidya Drego an analyst from Forrester wrote* last year, '*the mobile Internet is useful but not easy to use*'.

Providing a superb, intuitive user experience which is relevant to each individual user, on his or her choice of phone – is SurfKitchen's very DNA. This year's MWC will underline that the industry is starting to realise the potential of mobile internet services. However, even big brands cannot reach the mainstream – the vast majority of users – unless the inherent challenges of usability and discoverability of applications and services are overcome across the broadest range of phones. SurfKitchen's Mobile Internet platform succeeds in overcoming the discoverability, usability and fulfilment challenges typically associated with the delivery of mobile Internet applications and services – by making it easy and enjoyable for users to find, purchase and download the applications and services which *they* find relevant.

When the curtain draws on MWC this year, I think people in the industry will reflect on the mobile market and see it as a paradox. A market where the massive scale of mobile phone penetration has yet to be fully matched by the promises of software and mobile Internet services. Actually a parallel can be drawn with the PC market ; the PC started as a useful device largely for number-crunching and word processing until the commercial Internet opened an entirely new world for that platform for communications , applications and commerce. That's where I see the mobile Web today; on the cusp of a marriage between hardware and software; user demand and provider innovation. The amalgamation will I believe deliver a robust year ahead – even in challenging economic times and establish the mobile industry as the prevalent Internet access point of individual choice.

***Forrester UI 13: User Experience Misconceptions Debunked.** Vidya Drego
– 19 November 2008