

## How to Enable Mobile Internet for the Masses

There is an enormous gulf in the mobile world that is affecting users, providers and developers alike. It is stalling the growth of what could be one of the most powerful mobile technology applications to date and means that while tens of millions of people leave their homes with a data-enabled mobile phone every day, only one in five are taking advantage of that data.

According to JupiterResearch, only 16 percent of mobile owners regularly access the Internet from their mobile phones, with that figure set to rise to 28 percent forecast by 2012. However, that is only about 2 percent growth per year, so what will it take for the mobile Internet to reach mainstream adoption rates of around 40-50 percent?

To increase rates to mass adoption levels it will take a reconsideration of the mobile Internet and the way it is delivered, which ultimately benefits consumers, enables developers and rewards providers. Apple's iPhone offers a glimpse into the promise of the benefits of mass mobile Web adoption, but Apple's platform has a fractional penetration of the total available market. Showing your friend an i-beer application on your iPhone might impress them, but the platform's promise stops there if your friend's phone cannot access the same application. So how do we solve this disconnect and enable mass adoption?

To get there, it is important to reconsider the pain points that are slowing growth: user experience, content and technology.

### **User experience**

To date, providers have followed the adage "build-it-and-they-will-come," but to date, users haven't shown up in any volume. 63 percent of mobile phone owners are not using Internet services such as search, nor accessing information such as news, on their mobile phones. A Forrester Research report found that roughly one in four users say using the mobile Internet is not enjoyable or easy.

Part of the "build-it" philosophy has run aground on consumer expectations: consumers expect the PC on the phone. Some of this has to do with a broader misunderstanding that the mobile handset is supposed to be the next wave of *computing*. While the PC/laptop is stationary and delivers "big" data, quickly and graphically, the mobile Internet's value proposition is very different; it revolves around the ability to deliver "small" data—headlines, sports scores, weather—wherever or whenever the user wants it.

For most mobile phone users, browsing the Internet still falls into the category of "I can wait until I get home." And why not? The interface at home is familiar and download speed is rapid. But recall that mobile voice was in a similar pickle 10-15 years ago: mobile coverage was spotty, and, more often than not, calls dropped off mid-sentence.

The goal is to make the mobile Internet a compelling experience which requires little input by the user and delivers gratifying output.

### **Content**

The other reconsideration that will drive this brave new world is content. In the mobile world, too much traditional Web content (lots of text, large file sizes) has been shoe-horned into mobile phones, where the consumption experience is, in a word, dreadful. For the mobile Internet to gain traction, content needs to adhere to three core concepts: timeliness, usefulness and geographic utility.

Browsing and data consumption in the mobile world will never replicate what we experience from a PC, but there are elements of the mobile platform that are tailor-made for important types of content. Weather, news, sports scores, traffic information are the types of bite-sized data that will be the 'bread and butter' of the mobile experience.

As analyst Julie Ask points out in a recent JupiterResearch report: "the majority of activities consumers engage in online are ones they do with relatively high frequency." These activities include accessing email, using search engines and checking bank balances.

The problem today is that while that information is accessible on mobile phones, users either don't know where to find it or don't wait for it to download. Delivering that type of useful data in an instantly accessible manner is key. Location-based approaches to data delivery will round off mobile's differentiating core value. Think about the high value of receiving a traffic accident alert on your mobile phone several miles before reaching that accident.

### **Technology**

Enabling this shift requires a final reconsideration: the mobile browser itself. To date, a shrunken version of what worked on the PC has held sway among providers but frustrated consumers.

A recent JupiterResearch report laid out the new path succinctly. A browser alternative, leveraging widgets, gadgets or applets, is the type of efficiently built platform that is suitable for mobile phones. In this "alternate universe," data is pushed to or synched with a phone (potentially saving battery life in the process). The architecture is modular and open so that consumers can select apps that work for them (as opposed to the current model in which providers, by way of partnership agreements with publishers, offer the top 10 or so applications they think will resonate with users). As Ask points out, "My 80 percent is not necessarily your 80 percent."

Such an alternative—a mobile Internet portal—would feature an easy-to-navigate storefront to allow consumers to discover and download applications of their choice. This approach works as a long-tail business model not only for providers but for developers. The bigger the operators' widget catalogue, the more likely it is to hit the sweet spot and ultimately satisfy changing user interests and requirements. To reach the majority of users who don't have high-end devices, this environment must be open to a broad range of widget and application developers as well. In fact, looking at the whole value chain is the only way that users can enjoy the largest possible choice of services.

The mobile Internet portal would also serve as the back-end for applications once the services are purchased. For instance, it would manage the idle screen page, housing recent and most-used widgets to minimize clicking and portal navigation; it would also deliver analytics for mobile, to inform providers just what is and isn't resonating within the customer base.

### **Bring the mobile Internet to the masses**

Many minds and hours have been spent on these questions, and while we do not proclaim to have solved the problem of mass user adoption of the mobile Internet, we acknowledge that the mobile Internet demands a radically different approach than its PC-centric parent. There is a huge opportunity to feed consumer demand for 'instant' access to information 'snacks' and updates via the mobile Internet. Consumers overwhelmingly say that lower cost would motivate them to move to the mobile Internet more quickly, but as Jupiter's Ask points out, this is a red herring: Consumers have proven they will pay for compelling experiences.

Quickly and efficiently delivering information when and where users want it—whether it is sharing pictures with friends, glancing at a train timetable on a dash to the station or getting a weather update – will determine the winners and losers in the mobile Internet world and decide whether the mobile Internet ever reaches the masses.