

## Bridging the Platform Divide

### *A Compelling Cross-Platform User Experience can Prevent a Mobile-Platform War*

What a difference a year makes for mobile platforms. First the iPhone proved just how compelling and game-changing a mobile computing platform on a phone could become if designed and marketed correctly.

Then Google announced it would be launching an 'open' mobile OS platform by the name of Android. The pending launch has drawn media interest, with the basic idea being to bring the openness of the hardwired Web to the wireless one and of course, allow Google to sell more ads.

The Linux Mobile Foundation (LiMo) has gained traction by bringing Linux's open platform to the mobile world. Then Nokia spent \$410 million buying the outstanding shares in Symbian, and in effect, turn the Symbian platform into an open source foundation.

Clearly it seems to be 'game on' as software vendors, Internet giants, content owners, device manufacturers and mobile carriers battle for control of mobile consumers, dollars and, ultimately, their destinies.

Right now there are no fewer than eight major platforms vying for mindshare among mobile consumers: Microsoft, Apple (iPhone), Nokia-Symbian, Java, BREW (Qualcomm), LiMo, RIM (Blackberry) and the yet to be launched, Google Android. At the same time, carriers are trying to preserve some control over their services, even if it's not their former "[walled gardens](#)", to avoid becoming simple bit-pipes for data that's monetized by someone else.

Users aren't happy. A combination of platform problems, misapplied technology and lack of compelling content has conspired to keep the browsing experience frustrating. This not only prevents any meaningful increase in data ARPU, but also keeps churn high as consumers head off looking for new devices, each with a different look, feel and user experience.

Application developers smell money as they see mobile subscribers in the hundreds of millions, but loathe writing a single application to multiple operating systems. The platform wars are just beginning.

But there's a way to avoid this internecine warfare, one that helps solve platform tribalism, ensures that services can be scaled across platforms and that allows carriers to maintain control over the user experience and ultimately raise data ARPU. All it requires is for the industry to think differently.

Toyota became the world's No. 1 car manufacturer/producer in large part because it designs its cars not around the engine or the chassis but around the driver experience. This mindset needs to be adopted in the mobile industry: A simple, compelling and *consistent* user experience must be the driving consideration.

For carriers, a consistent and compelling user experience will not only increase mobile data service usage, but also increasingly become a key source of competitive differentiation. The introduction of the iPhone was a rude awakening for many carriers who suddenly realized that their user experience could be trumped by a device manufacturer who had no experience in the mobile sector.

To date, carriers argue over who offers the best network coverage, but as universal coverage becomes the norm, that point of differentiation vanishes. So, it's in the provider's interest to tie consumers to their experience. That user experience really becomes the carrier experience, enhancing the overall brand value.

A consistent experience, enabled, for example with technology such as an on-device platform, can serve as the best of both worlds for carriers. It allows them to migrate from a walled garden service offering to being able to offer mass personalization through mobile widgets that are distributed via On-Device Portals.

Consistency is arguably even more important for applications developers, many of whom are scratching their head wondering why XHTML, AJAX or Web Service type APIs aren't commonplace in the mobile world. By enabling developers to design once and populate many, it also encourages service creation, as a cross-platform world provides a greater incentive to developers as they know that their designs will quickly reach the broadest possible audience. This works to the benefit of carriers as well. For example, carriers can quickly launch a popular service across their whole device portfolio, which in turn adds value, builds loyalty and drives revenue.

For consumers, consistency by definition brings ease of use, which drives mobile data service usage, increases satisfaction and begins to erase some of those lingering frustrations with the Mobile 1.0 interface and services.

All markets go through cycles. Emerging markets tend to support a welter of technological innovation, which can create fragmented and confusing choices for consumers. A brutal, swift consolidation generally follows. The mobile industry can minimize that painful business evolution by building a consistent cross-platform experience that not only serves consumers, but importantly, drives data ARPU and reduces churn.

For the mobile web to emulate the success of Web 2.0, the industry needs to embrace the dynamism and choice users have to come to expect on the Internet. Those companies that do will see their business scale quickly. Those who don't will find themselves pushed deeper into a corner and increasingly isolated in a cross-platform world.

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