



The Mobile Internet is always on – and always active

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Consumers transfer their PC habits to handsets, then proceed to do even more online.



Simpson: Mobility ups the ante for Internet usage. Photo: Novarra

By Bruce Simpson, CEO, Novarra

Forget about webmail: Social networking and content sharing sites like Facebook, Flickr and Craigslist are now the most visited Internet sites on mobile devices, according to recent usage data from my company, which provides mobile Internet software.

Social media are redefining what it means to be constantly connected and accelerating the transition of the mobile Internet from merely “always on,” to “always on, always active.” This new paradigm promises to have a significant impact on society, enabling consumers to communicate anytime, anywhere – proactively.

At first blush this seems like a classic situation where everybody wins: Consumers are eager to transfer PC web habits to mobile. In one recent study, 30% of 16- to 35-year-olds accessed Facebook and Twitter via their mobile devices.

But unlike PCs (and even bulky laptops), the four billion mobile phones deployed globally are with consumers at all times; this means the so-called “window of engagement” on mobile devices is 20 to 30 times greater than on computers.

Internet brands can be even more connected to their audiences, and mobile advertisers have much to gain by the continued maturation of the mobile web. Faster, richer mobile browsing could lead to customer awareness and interaction.

And mobile network operators finally have a service that can help drive up data usage and revenue, and to re-energize growth – especially important in developed markets that are approaching voice plan saturation.

It is a promising vision. Yet, hurdles do exist for mobile Internet.

- *Operators face the threat of network congestion* despite huge increases in network capacity in recent years. Viral content sharing, video access and deep browsing contribute to accelerated data traffic growth – and the increasing likelihood of capacity constraints. Already there is talk of capping data usage or throttling services to ensure continued profitability.
- *Consumers' expectations have risen*, especially around the mobile Internet. Users unfamiliar with or disappointed by early services now expect a rich, full and fast mobile internet experience – similar to what they enjoy on their PCs. Eventually, consumers will find that too many downloaded applications are unmanageable, preferring simple, familiar web access to their favorite services with usability aids that leverage the unique capabilities of the mobile device and provide an optimum user experience.
- *Smart phones, as great as they are, still have shortcomings*. The phenomenal growth in smart phones comes with the expectation that users will experience better browsing functionality and the benefits of “always on, always active” mobile Internet. A number of new devices come purposely built for social networking. But the truth is even the most robust smart phone browser is not as capable as the browser on a PC. Increasingly complex and rich web technologies will continue to challenge device capabilities, risking disappointment with smart phones.

Fortunately, technology exists today that significantly smoothes this transition to mobile social networking and other Web 2.0 activity, and beyond.

For many service providers, at the core is a distributed architecture solution (like the one Novarra delivers that can be accessed by two-thirds of U.S. mobile subscribers and one billion mobile users worldwide), which splits processing between the network and the mobile device. Web content is automatically optimized or adapted for the specific capabilities of all types of mobile devices, which can number in the tens of thousands.

This solution delivers the best experience for mobile internet usability and service mash-ups that combine location, context and site content. Additionally, these distributed solutions can reduce the amount of over-the-air “payload” on the carriers’ networks simply by managing the way content is delivered to handsets.

All this work in the network relieves pressure on handsets, which arguably can never keep pace with the capabilities of a PC and the rapid technology changes on the Web.

The result enables consumers to truly transfer PC Web habits to mobile and enjoy the full value of internet mobility, especially mobile Web 2.0. It gives service providers the ability to launch compelling new services that drive meaningful data revenue while maximizing network investments. Ultimately, it enables an always on – and just as crucially, always active – mobile Internet.

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