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## The whole of the net in your hand

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**For a long time using the net via your mobile phone has been an exercise in frustration.**

Browsing speeds have been slow, the places you can go have been restricted because surfing has to be done via the portal of your carrier and the cost of just using the net has been very high.

But slowly and steadily the situation is changing.

T-Mobile, Vodafone, Orange and Three offer flat rate price plans for using the net. O2 will introduce its flat rate plan in October - just prior to the UK iPhone launch.

However, most impose monthly data download limits and some stop customers using some net services - such as Skype or streaming video.

Some operators also levy extra charges if a customer exceeds the monthly data limit or downloads data, be it music or video, rather than just browse. Anyone planning to get a net service on their mobile would be well advised to click around on the operators' website to see what you do, and do not, get for your money.



More people have handsets than own a PC with net access

## Pattern recognition

The numbers of mobile phone users accessing the web is growing steadily. The most recent figures available, for February 2007, from the Mobile Data Association show that almost 15 million people use the web via their handsets each month.

T-Mobile was the first in the UK to bring in a flat-rate pricing plan for net use under the banner of its "web and walk" service.

Richard Warmsley, head of internet on the move at T-Mobile, said more than 500,000 people had signed up to "web and walk" in the 18 months since it was launched.

Lifestyle changes and the increasingly connected lives of 21st Century Britons was driving many people to use the service, he said.

"Usage is as diverse as the people using it," he said.

Increasingly, he said, what people do on a PC they want to do on a phone too.

"Social networking has rocketed up the charts recently," he said. Sites such as Bebo, MySpace, Facebook and eBay have become very popular destinations for customers.

"Half of our customers surf the internet on their mobile when they are at home watching TV," he said. "They do not need to go to a laptop and fire it up. The mobile is there for them."



Phones are becoming devices that can handle all kinds of data

## Broad church

For Al Russell, Vodafone's head of mobile internet services, it is not just lifestyle changes that have conspired to get people signing up to browse on their handset.

Flat rate prices, accelerating mobile data speeds, increasing numbers of handsets that are web capable and the tearing down of the walls around operators' portals have all helped to "liberate usage" among customers.

But, he said, it was hard to predict what people wanted to do when browsing the web via the phone.

Some, he said, used the phone to help when they were out and about but what people looked for was very diverse.

"It's different and relevant to the individual," said Mr Russell, "It's the real long tail of relevance."

For Jayanthi Rangarajan, head of Novarra which works with operators to get mobile net access working, the reason mobile operators want to get their customers surfing via their handsets is simple: money.

In mature markets competition was putting pressure on the cash that operators make from voice calls - the main source of revenue for many, she said.

Mobile firms had to get their customers using data to offset how much they stood to lose as voice revenue declines, said Ms Rangarajan.

"Operators can see the data Average Return Per User (Arpu) grow and that's compelling and that's a driver," she said.

Statistics gathered by Novarra show that open web browsing boosts data downloads from an average of 0.18 megabytes per day to 0.6.

Operators had started to realise too that, for many, the mobile phone is the gadget they carry with them all day and may become the preferred way to access the net.

"There's a huge population of people that are not sitting in front of a computer all day," she said.

Getting more people to use the web on their phone also helped drive them to spend more money on the portals operators have created, she said.

Customers that use the mobile net also make much more use of the portals that operators run.

#### UK MOBILE DATA PLANS

- ♦ Vodafone - £7.50 a month (120MB monthly limit)
- ♦ T Mobile - £7.50 a month (1GB monthly limit)
- ♦ Orange - £8 a month (30MB monthly limit)
- ♦ 3 - £5 a month (1GB monthly limit)
- ♦ 02 - £7.50 (200MB monthly limit)



Walled gardens have become stores for games, ringtones and wallpapers

"If you're now starting to look at your telephone rather than put it to your ear there's more chance you're going to start interacting with what's offered via the portal," said Ms Rangarajan. "And that could go far beyond games, ringtones, screensavers and wallpapers."

Having people look at their phones means they become mobile billboards and potential sites to serve up adverts - yet another way for the operators to recoup some cash.

But, she said, operators had to be careful about how they made use of what they knew about customers and how they served up adverts.

"The potential for doing it wrong is so much more apparent," she said.