



Digital Britain: any content, anywhere?

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The UK's Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) issued a report last month calling for the mobile industry to offer any content, on any handset, over any network.

The Digital Britain report has been lauded by factions of the mobile industry as the call to action that the industry needs to kick-start the mobile Internet despite the industry fragmentation that has prevented mass-market usage of the service.

Scott Cotter, director of marketing at Novarra, believes the 'any network, on any handset, anywhere' vision is a complex proposition and the DCMS' call must go beyond networks alone. "To truly understand how to address this need, the industry must address all layers – not just network transport," Cotter told *mobile*^{SQUARED}.

He argues that this means not just made-for-mobile content but also "street HTML, with the full fabric of the Internet including video, Flash and widgets".

Today, content providers bear the cost of adapting their content by authoring multiple versions for a variety of handsets and networks. The vision of a single standard will likely force a "lowest common denominator mentality and hinder innovation and creativity," Cotter adds. One solution, he says, is to place the burden on operators to provide application and presentation layer services in-network to help address fragmentation issues.

This vision of ubiquitous content must not lose sight of device context, argues Dave Roberts, channel manager at Volantis Systems. "It's all about TV, mobile and PC working together," he told *mobile*^{SQUARED}. "Provide a view on content across any channel but ensure that it's contextually sensitive. The overall user experience of all content is paramount, rather than making everything available on all channels."

With increased pricing transparency for mobile data, consumers are beginning to vote with their wallets when it comes to the mobile Internet. The iPhone App Store, says Cotter, provides a lot of rich content on "arguably the most successful converged device yet to hit the market".

But has Apple's walled garden simply replaced the operator constraints of the past? Any "limiting" environment invites a challenge, as those of the fixed and mobile Internet have faced.

Mobile operator walled gardens have opened up and are undergoing a transformation while content providers such as Apple and Amazon make inroads into their markets. Indeed, this has happened without government intervention.

One of the key facets of Digital Britain is a call for the release of the 2.6GHz spectrum band for LTE and beyond, highlighting the benefits of the so-called 'Digital Dividend'. But it also places significant emphasis on operators to replicate 2G coverage for mobile data and mark their "significant contribution to the broadband universal service commitment".

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