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Testing the Mobile Experience

By Umang Gupta
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With investments in 3G networks and growing consumer demands, the convergence of Internet and mobility was inevitable. Through this convergence, the mobile Internet has created opportunities for all players in the mobile ecosystem, including carriers, handset manufacturers and content developers, as well as the marketers, advertisers and vertical industries that support them. And while the mobile Internet has emerged as a new and potentially lucrative revenue stream instigating innovative products/services and a surge of initial deployments, end-user adoption has been slow to follow.

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What's the problem? Customer demand appears to be strong. Across a variety of demographics, end-users are latching onto the latest and greatest devices with increasingly sophisticated interfaces and functionality. Just look at the businesswoman next to you at the bank or the teenager next door. But to fully capitalize on the evident subscriber enthusiasm for sophisticated devices being offered by major players such as Apple and Samsung, all of the players in the mobile ecosystem need to be cognizant of the all-important end-user experience.

A better experience equates to pleased subscribers and greater revenues. So why does the quality problem continue to persist? It's what we call a "chicken and the egg" situation. Understandably, carriers do not have the resources to test all mobile content across every device, so they are only focusing on the top providers, placing the burden of ensuring the user experience on the small players until their downloads/sites are popular enough to generate enough money to justify the investment. But how can a small content creator become popular enough to generate that revenue if an undesirable mobile experience is turning away customers? And, with limited resources at their disposal, how can they test the experience themselves?

The pressure is currently on content developers to create a better mobile experience and build scaleable services, while carriers are tasked with investing in networks that can operate seamlessly. From the consumers' stance, if they just spent a couple of hundred dollars on the smartphone of their choice, plus an additional $100 per month for the service, and a Web page takes minutes to load and doesn't render correctly - well, you're obviously not going to have very happy subscribers.

Efforts to rectify this situation will not go unrewarded. Fortunately, the industry's revenue-sharing model between carriers and content creators for wireless downloads presents a win-win situation. Ensuring the mobile experience protects the all-important revenue stream.

If I'm a content provider, is it always my fault if there is poor performance? If I'm a carrier, is it my fault that content will not render properly on a mobile device due to design issues? Of course not. It is and will always be a balance between the device, the network performance and the content provider.

There are various factors that will rectify the underlying issues - mainly carriers' commitment to improving and building out wireless networks and content creators' ever-increasing understanding of designing for mobile browsers and a smaller screen. But, the real key to resolving specific issues is understanding where the problem lies - is it the network or the content that is causing delays or another undesirable end result? There needs to be a third party - an unbiased, trusted entity that can quickly identify a problem, pinpoint the origin and provide guidance on how to fix it.

By monitoring mobile content and applications across a variety of handsets and geographic locations, mobile players can ensure the protection of the revenue stream. While testing and monitoring cannot prevent the outages, it can quickly identify them and alert the carrier or content provider, thereby limiting lost revenue.

Mobility is prevalent - there are far more mobile devices than PCs - but there is a lag in terms of the mobile Web experience. Others may argue that the mobile Web will naturally catch up to its traditional counterpart in due time and when that happens there will be no need to differentiate between the two platforms; however it is not happening in the foreseeable future. In the coming years, we will need to recognize and address the uniqueness of the mobile Internet experience in order to protect and stimulate the revenue stream for all of the players in the mobile ecosystem.

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