

Gaining advantage from the mobile internet requires new perspective

The mobile internet is starting to take off. For several years it has failed to live up to the early hype but things are changing fast. Networks are introducing affordable all-you-can-eat data packages similar to broadband subscriptions but considerably cheaper. They've also begun to embrace the attraction of their customers to big brands like eBay, MySpace, and Amazon over their limited-appeal proprietary walled gardens. Bidders on eBay can monitor an auction, and even bid, while away from their PC; MySpace users can check for messages. Brands like these are bringing people to the mobile internet and making it mainstream.

The user experience is only limited if you think of a mobile as a mini PC

The mobile user experience is very different from the PC. The screen is small, input is fiddly, download times are long and connections get dropped. Users' concerns about security are also heightened. They perceive over-air connections to be insecure and they worry about what might happen to data when their phone is lost or stolen. These factors are only limitations if you think of the phone as a mini PC and you fail to recognise the unique features of mobile such as location awareness and the fact that it goes everywhere with the user.



Services must recognise that people want to do different things on their mobile

What people want to do when they are out and about is very different to what they want to do in front of a PC. Take the example of paid-for music downloading. At home people are inclined to browse new releases, favourite genres and artists on their PC. Out and about they hear something they like and they want to download and play it there and then; they are much less likely to want to browse. The implication for designing the mobile service component of a music-downloading service is clear; Search must be the most immediate and prominent feature on the screen. Small screen and fiddly input cease to be limitations when you design for what people want to do. Understanding users' goals and making them quick and easy to achieve is key.

A PC-mobile internet experience must be greater than the sum of its parts

Compelling PC-mobile services don't just offer multi-channel access; they provide an integrated experience that takes into account the different affordances of the two devices. Going back to music, customers are more inclined to buy over air if they are first able to register their credit card details on PC and simply sign in on their mobile. And if they lose their mobile phone they are able to switch off the mobile component of the service from their PC. Those who initially don't want to buy over air should be able to 'bookmark' a song for later download to PC.

Our experience can help you take advantage of the mobile opportunity

Over the last two years we have worked extensively with clients like 3, Orange, Nokia, Vodafone, ShoZu, Metro, Sky and Totaljobs to support the development of PC-mobile internet services. We support our clients through our accumulated experience and by conducting ethnographic research and usability testing. Our contextual research methods help uncover the tacit needs and goals key to extending your service to mobile. *new experience* is a London-based user experience consultancy working mainly in web and mobile. For more details please visit our website www.new-experience.com.