

The 'Accidental Majority' and the near future for smartphones

Over the course of several recent studies we've run into a group we've taken to calling the Accidental Majority. They are people now coming to smartphones who don't really want to get rid of their old feature phone but are either convinced by others that they need to 'keep up with the times', or find themselves talked into it by an engaging salesperson when renewing their contract.

Typically they acquire an Android phone and feel somewhat at sea and unsupported. While they appreciate really useful features like maps, email and social networking, there is much that confuses or frustrates them. In fact with the battery seeming to drain faster than their old phone, and difficulties experienced with supposedly basic functions like ending a call, the transition to a smartphone can be anything but smooth.

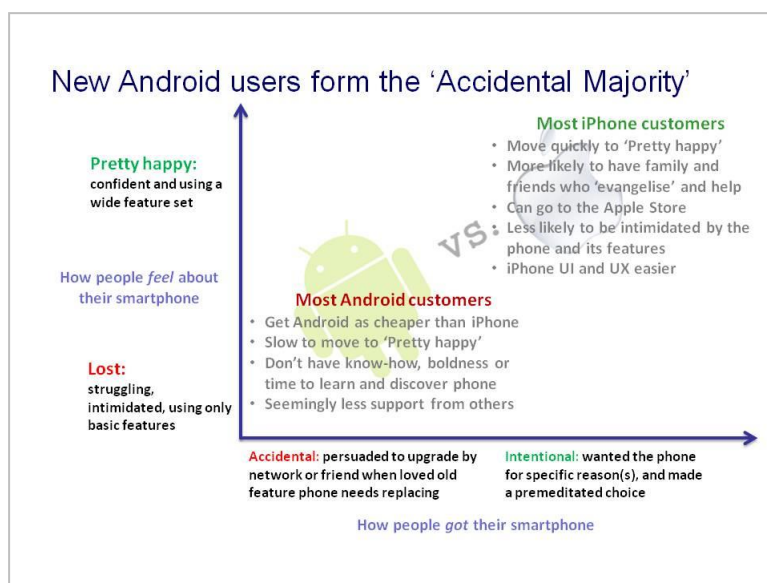
A recent YouGov study* reported that 53% of the UK mobile population still own a standard or feature phone, and 42% of them expect to get a smartphone as their next mobile. They are relative latecomers to smartphones without the level of interest of early adopters or the early majority. The industry calls them Late Majority, but we think Accidental Majority best describes these users who have really just stumbled into smartphone ownership.

What's clear is that over the next year or two this huge 'third wave' represents a major opportunity for those companies prepared to take the time to understand and support these users. Just think back a few years to when the late majority first went online. That's where we are now with smartphones.



Why Android not iPhone

The Accidental Majority mostly comprises Android users. Many networks are selling, even pushing, Android phones to less savvy people, who don't really know what they are getting into. They make this less 'intentional' purchase because they are put off by the high cost of an iPhone, and think Android phones are a way of getting 'the same thing' as an iPhone, but for less. They like the idea of a smartphone but struggle with the reality and complexities of Android, and its open-source platform.



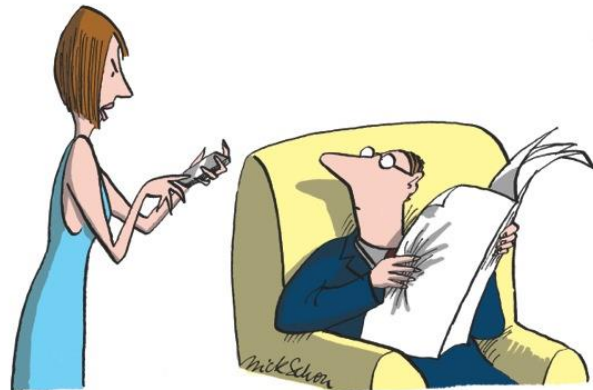
These people lack some of the technical savvy and support that those buying iPhones get; they often struggle with even the most basic features, but have no obvious recourse to help.

In contrast, those who choose iPhones as their first smartphone are typically quite happy with their phone. These people are often more methodical in their choice, do more research, and develop the specific intention of buying an iPhone and paying extra for it.

Help, there's no Android Store!

Getting going with an Android phone proves difficult for the Accidental Majority as no real support is provided. Users are surprised and annoyed to find there is no paper guide included in the box, and have difficulty getting information from their friends or family.

Accidental Majority users feel neglected by handset manufacturers, who seem to assume everyone now knows how to use a smartphone. They feel left behind, as if they missed the boat. They are unlikely to go online to look for information about how their phone works, and lament that unlike with Apple there is no 'Android Store' to go to for help.



"IT'S TAKEN ME AN HOUR TO FIND OUT FROM THE MAP APP THAT THERE'S NO ANDROID STORE."

Bugbears that can trip up the Accidental Majority

There are lots of things that can trip up the Accidental Majority. Here are just a few:

Many don't actually know that they are *Android* users, let alone what an OS is. They are much more likely to think of themselves as Sony, HTC or Samsung users.

They aren't always aware they can use their phone on WiFi rather than just over the air.

Accidental Majority avoid using the most interesting and useful features of their phone due to fears of racking up a huge bill.

They experience difficulty answering and hanging up calls, discovering that they are still on a call long after they thought they'd finished!

They don't know how and where to get apps, and just stick to the native ones available on their phone. There is also a good deal of confusion around the differences and benefits of using an app over a website.

Seizing the Accidental Majority opportunity

The Accidental Majority represents a very sizeable chunk of the market coming to smartphones. While they experience difficulties with their smartphone they are all confident using and transacting on the the high web. As e-commerce shifts to embrace the mobile platform the Accidental Majority represents a huge and untapped opportunity.

Handset manufacturers, platform providers, network operators and companies that wish to do business through smartphones need to recognise, understand and design for this important group of users.

* <http://yougov.co.uk/news/2012/03/23/standard-vs-smart-phone/>

new experience is a London-based user experience research consultancy that specialises in ethnographic research, participatory design, service trials and usability testing.

To find out more visit www.new-experience.com or call us on 020 8616 4200.