

# How to Build the Cornerstones for a Satisfying Mass Market Mobile Internet User Experience

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## **ABSTRACT**

Mobile network operators (MNO) used to provide mobile content predominantly via their own portals like the "Vodafone live!" (VFL!) portal. Customers can download e.g. games or ringtones from these portals or use selected information services. Possibilities in the past often remained restricted to the MNO's predefined offerings, though. In the meantime, MNO have realized that they have to step out of these "walled gardens" if they want to offer relevant services for the masses and create a positive user experience beyond a naturally limited number of particular portal services.

The big question is how to do this step. The answer to this question besides a technical solution first of all requires overcoming many customers' reservations regarding any advanced mobile services and creating awareness and interest.

## **Keywords**

Mobile portal, content adaptation, mobile browser, walled garden

## **INTRODUCTION**

In interviews, the vast majority of customers state that they only want to use their mobile phone for voice calls, SMS and once in a while to take a photo [1][2]. With respect to mobile Internet, Swisscom market research revealed that the lack of interest is often a result of negative perceptions (only for geeks, slow, expensive, immature), lacking imagination and disappointing previous experiences with other value-added services. However, when people get the chance to actually use the mobile Internet for themselves, the experience usually generates a "wow-effect" evoking statements like: "Being able to access Google on your phone is pretty cool!"

## **Fixed Internet Users**

With a PC, about 72 % of Swiss population use the Internet occasionally and more than 48% are even "Heavy Users" with nearly every day usage [5]. This is a large customer base to address, although preferences, acquaintance, usage patterns and skill differ a lot [4].

## **Requirements for Mobile Usage**

With this diversity in the customer base a pre-defined subset of web sites brought to the mobile phone will not be sufficient for a successful mobile Internet offering. Rather subscribers have to be able to enjoy the broad richness of content from the "fixed" Internet on their mobile phones and do so with a satisfying user experience.

## **TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS**

Such a positive user experience allowing diversified, widespread and persistent mobile Internet usage has some specific –primarily technological– prerequisites. So a major challenge for MNO is to define in which way to accomplish these technological prerequisites.

## **Possible Enablers**

Principally there are four possible technological enablers to realise mobile Internet. These are handsets, browser, content adaptation gateways and web sites.

## **Characteristics**

Focusing the proposition on just a specific segment of customers who have a highly qualified "hero" mobile browsing handset will ensure a good user experience with low effort for the operator but for a currently rather small – though growing- number of customers only. Offering a downloadable browser with regards to many customers implies a quite demanding task and even with a specific pre-installed browser on a larger number of terminals there will yet remain constraints like where to find the browser in the terminal menu and missing presentability of certain elements. A content adaptation gateway in the operator's network enables the broadest offering to the largest market

but like many browsers so far these solutions are not technically mature enough to always deliver satisfying results to the customers either. Web sites optimised for mobile phone usage are mass market capable but present only a small fraction and thus restrict mobile Internet to just a small subset of the “real” web.

**Valuation**

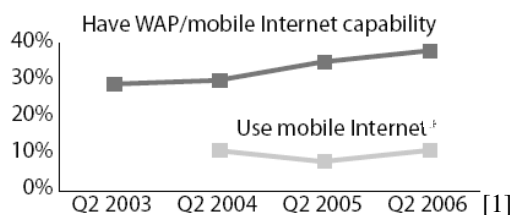
Although none of these four enablers should definitely be excluded, browser and mobile web sites alone do not seem adequate to be the primary base of a successful and broadly accepted mobile Internet value proposition. Leading edge mobile browsing devices, on the other hand, will in any case be in the centre of a mobile Internet offering whereupon the value add the operator can deliver to the owners of such devices is limited. A content adaptation gateway in this regard is a much more striking lever which makes it –sufficient technological maturity provided– an interesting opportunity. Other pros of the gateway are data compression (positively influencing the customer’s data consumption and thus expenses) and possibilities for personalisation and protection of minors.

**BRANDING OPTIONS**

Another major question besides technology is branding. This question is closely related to the design of the start-page or portal as well as to service awareness, discovery and access.

**Vodafone live! - Today**

In the mobile space since late 2003 Vodafone live! (VFL!) has been the Swisscom Mobile online services portal. As a “semi-walled-garden” portal it is the entry point to Swisscom own services like ringtones, games, TV, music or information services plus selected 3<sup>rd</sup> party services (“friendly off-net” services). Backed up by large marketing campaigns, a wide variety of mobile terminals with dedicated VFL! keys and liaison with the Vodafone group, VFL! has met a steady two digit portion of Swisscom Mobile customers. But while monthly gross portal revenue is rising the number of active users has begun to stagnate lately. The same observation was beforehand already made in other European countries where numbers of mobile Internet users could not follow the increase of capable devices:



This data moreover coincides with the finding that a number of interviewed customers expected the VFL! start-page to be advertising space only and a couple of them rated it as not attractive and slow. Usage of VFL! is consequently often confined to moments when there is no other media available. On the other hand, there are important favourable elements of VFL! like its navigation which users experience as simple and intuitive. Even so, the bottom line is that for VFL! it may be a long and tough way to in the broad customer base gain the same credibility and acceptance for “real” mobile Internet as for previous mobile specific content and services in its current user base.

**Bluewin - Today**

In the fix network Swisscom Fixnet with more than 1.5 million broadband customers is Switzerland’s largest Internet access provider. Its “Bluewin” portal is the far mostly visited .ch site in Switzerland [3]. Acceptance and credibility of Bluewin as a gate to the World Wide Web can thus be judged very high. In trials for mobile access to the “real” web Swisscom Mobile customers in many cases expected Bluewin to be the start-page.

**And Tomorrow?**

In fact, -especially after by beginning of 2008 Swisscom Mobile and Swisscom Fixnet will have been united in one company “Swisscom Switzerland”- why should the Bluewin portal not also be used as the start-page for mobile Internet access? Apart from the question whether convergence is a customer need, this solution would have two essential advantages: First of all the portal could be used to tell its visitors about its parallel mobile availability, creating immediately a much higher awareness. Secondly, credibility and trust in Bluewin as a good Internet start-page is already there. Moreover, in case of personalisation this could automatically also apply with mobile access respectively customers would know where to go if they want to personalise their mobile Internet start-page. In this way customers would not only become aware of the fact that mobile Internet is possible but also be guided to a smooth and familiar entry to this proposition.

The mobile version of the portal would of course need major adjustments. Some important building blocks for a good mobile customer experience would have to be added while other elements should be omitted. A direct link to VFL! plus separate links to some of the most important Swisscom or 3<sup>rd</sup> party hero services would have to grant easy access to the most popular mobile content services. Vice versa the VFL! portal would link to the Bluewin portal for open web access. The idea is as an intermediate solution for the two portals to enrich and complement each other in letting the customer get what he wants as simple and quickly as possible. Long term they may be converged to one portal.

### **Device Settings**

To device-specifically optimise the customer experience for all his online data activities the following approach is possible. VFL! keys will still link to the VFL! Wap portal. The browser button or browsing menu option will instead link to the Bluewin portal which has to be pre-installed or realised just as effortless for the customer by a simple WAP-push command. Only for low-tier devices where a good mobile browsing experience cannot be provided, both ways will lead to VFL!. When leaving the Bluewin Portal and surfing the open Web there may again be a differentiation of devices: High-end browsing devices may get the original sites (with possibly yet some image compression) while for the rest the sites will be rendered by a content adaptation gateway in the network to allow better usability.

### **Promotion**

Promotion for mobile Internet can in this way address mass market and thus provide the vital prerequisite for any wide customer acceptance service, i.e. awareness and interest in the broad customer base.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Satisfying mobile Internet customer experience for the mass market is a complex and challenging target with very many influencing factors, most of which have not been dealt with in this paper (with pricing being one important example). However, the fundamental pre-condition for a corresponding mobile Internet proposition is to be relevant and accepted not only by a tiny niche market but to be

available for and noted and accepted by many MNO's customers. To achieve this target the MNO has first of all to provide for necessary technology enablers and leverage a well known portal brand which customers already use and trust.

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