

Mobile Internet Is It a Toy Just for Young?

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Mobile Internet – Is It a Toy Just for Young?

Internet via the mobile phone has taken off, but perhaps not at a level that satisfies the network operators. Overall, 29 percent of adults in Great Britain have ever used their mobile phone to access the internet. However, if one looks across the different age groups then there is considerable variation. Not surprisingly, among 16-to-24 year olds, more than half (53%) have at one time surfed the internet using a mobile whilst seven percent of those 55 and over say they have ever used mobile internet.

These are some of the results of a recent survey of 2,144 adults in Great Britain conducted online by Harris Interactive® between March 28 and April 2, 2007.

Regular Use of Mobile Internet is Relatively Low

When looking at uptake of applications such as mobile internet, there are two dimensions to consider. The first is adoption, which is width of penetration across the population. The next dimension is the subsequent frequency and intensity of use, i.e., depth of penetration. Although more than half (53%) of 16-to-24 year olds say they have ever used mobile internet, more than one third of them (36%) are using it at least once per week and 13 percent on a daily basis. Among this group of 16-to-24 year olds there is a large proportion (47%) who have not tried mobile internet – perhaps because they do not have an enabled phone or are unconvinced by the benefits of the application. There are those who have enabled phones and mobile internet experience, albeit shallow. The service providers need to provide customers with more information on the benefits and guide them on how to use it.

Mobile Internet Not Yet Mainstream

The cost and the complexity of the charging structure have often been reported as reasons why mobile Internet is not yet considered mainstream. A majority of charges for this service are based around cost per megabyte making it difficult for the user to gauge what they are spending at any one time. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is the more affluent consumer who is the more intensive user with 40 percent of ABs who have tried mobile internet accessing it at least once a week. Intensity falls down the affluence scale so that only 38 percent of C1s, 29 percent of C2s and 23 percent DEs are using mobile internet with the same degree of frequency.

Pre-pay still dominates payment plans in the UK, especially among the younger consumers, even though mobile operators are trying to move more subscribers on to contracts. Tom Perrott, Insight Director within the Harris Interactive Europe Technology Research Practice, comments, "Networks will have to work hardest among the pre-pay customers to implement a charging structure that does not hold back use, but still provides them with the much needed revenue stream to reduce their dependence on just voice and text."

Perrot adds, "Apart from younger consumers being the earlier adopters, males also tend to take up technology sooner than females and initially are the more intensive users." Whilst males make up half the adult population in Great Britain, 62 percent of all of those who have ever used mobile Internet there are males. And among all adults who use mobile internet, males account for nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who use this application at least once-a-week.

Conclusions

As occurs with most technologies, it is the younger consumer who is the most active mobile internet user. Using a mobile phone for internet searches is more common than using it for accessing emails, particularly among the youngest age group of 16-to-24 year olds. This may reflect the popularity of texting and perhaps the charging structure for Short Message Service (SMS) versus mobile email when considering peer-to-peer communication.

Nevertheless, mobile internet is not exclusive to the younger, more affluent and male population; they probably provide a solid base of users. The challenge for the network providers is to attract more compelling and affordable content to this platform to appeal to a wider audience.

Tom Perrott comments further, "Repeat use of mobile internet will depend on what is available on this platform and like mobile TV will be driven by content. Previous Harris Interactive research that looked at uptake of mobile internet indicated that TV sport was the most desired content when on the move. Major sporting occasions, particularly tournaments, may boost mobile Internet trial and then subsequent use."

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