Apple App Store Leads For Mobile But Market Still Open

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We often seem to think that the Apple App Store has a dominant market position for mobile devices, helped in no small part by the extensive press coverage it seems to attract.

Recent research by GfK Technology (1,000 online interviews conducted in January 2010) suggests, however, that the app store market is in reality more varied, with a wide range of stores competing for business.

The Apple App Store does indeed lead the market, but with only 39% of consumers (who downloaded an application for their mobile device in the last three months) using it, rather than a convincing majority.

Thatâ€™s not to say that they are better than other stores at achieving sales or encouraging repeat visits, but in terms of where individuals do their mobile apps shopping, Apple still has some way to go before taking the majority of the market.

Of course, this is in no small part a reflection of the Apple iPhoneâ€™s market share as it still represents a very small proportion of the overall number of handsets in the market, so unless you have one, the Apple App Store is not much use to you.

Given this, it certainly seems to be punching above its weight with a vastly higher proportion of iPhone users visiting the store than is the case for other handset makes.

Following the Apple App store (in our research) are Ovi and BlackBerry, both with a 20% share of the market and then Samsung with a 13% share.

Itâ€™s also worth noting that Android currently have a 10% share of the market (among those accessing a mobile app store in the last three months) which is a pretty impressive place to be after such a short space of time.

Itâ€™s interesting that the top four mobile app stores are handset manufacturers rather than network operators. Nick Clarey, founder of Airsource, a mobile apps consultancy based in Cambridge (UK), thinks that operators have a greater challenge to make headway in this space.

"The difficulty that operators face is that their app stores need to cover the full range of handsets across different manufacturers. For a manufacturer they can always just focus on their models which means they are better able to have a better interface for their customers.â€•

Our research certainly shows Orange (11%) Vodafone (10%) and O2â€™s (9%) share of the mobile apps store market trailing handset manufacturers.

The benefit they have, of course, is their proximity to the customer with a very intimate knowledge of their mobile phone behaviours, so what they might lack in terms of being able to maximise the customer experience across devices, they need to compensate for through leveraging their customer closeness.

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