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Where Content on-the-go and Rich Mobile Media Services Meet

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Must-have content is one of the most fundamental elements in attracting and retaining mobile customers. As mobile penetration rates reach saturation point in many markets, it's the ability to deliver the best multi-media content that has become a key differentiator for many operators. Motivated by this demand, operators across the globe are beginning to realize both the potential but also the challenges involved in successfully launching rich media content services to millions of subscribers.

Content is still king

Many mobile subscribers are demanding more of the real-time delivery of live news alerts, sports and other rich media mobile entertainment content to their favourite device. But operators queuing up to launch these services must remember that the end user wants the very best in multimedia messaging experiences and error-free delivery of any visual communications they're ready to share. Operators can generate revenue from a wealth of new generation rich media content services for the mobile community, ranging from Application-to-Person services (Sports, News, Music, Mobile Commerce, Community, Forums, Dating) - available through Browsing (WAP, iMode), Streaming or Download – to Person-to-Person communications (over MMS, SMS, IM, Push-to-Talk, Video mail, Push-to-Show and more).

Any device, any time

Given the extent and variety of potential exposure to rich media information on the one hand, and the ability to provide consumers rich visual communication moments on the other, operators are introducing a wide range of devices that vary in media capabilities. Furthermore, network operators report a very high turnover rate of devices, (in some case even two devices per week!). These devices differ from each other in colour depth, resolution, screen size, formats supported, memory and up to more than 100 different attributes for each device.

The biggest frustration for end-users is the incompatibility between handsets, meaning that content they receive from friends is not necessarily supported by their device, making it un-viewable. The dissatisfaction with this incompatibility is often directed at

the operators, when keeping the customer happy is of paramount importance is this highly competitive market.

Ultimately, the problem is only going to escalate as the mobile environment is fast becoming a viable choice for marketing, promotion, sales and distribution for the media industry. The potential revenue increase for mobile operators from non-voice applications is tremendous. By not addressing the issue of media adaptation now, operators will hinder future growth and development. In May 2005, Yankee Group underlined that customer experience is a key growth driver for European mobile operators. Yankee Group argues that both operational and financial performance will be improved by including customer-centric, qualitative key performance indicators (KPIs), such as service quality, brand attributes, customer contact, and service and product perception.

Media adaptation

Ringtones have grown in popularity in recent years, but the issue of different devices makes providing a service for downloading of ringtones challenging. Until recently, ringtone download services depended on manual upload of numerous flavours of the same ringtone by the content provider. With the growing popularity of centralized content management systems, operators are now looking to manage the rich media content delivery package - ringtones, wallpapers, images, themes, audio and video - from a single, central location.

Having a network-intelligent content adaptation function that is capable of handling any device that the operator offers to consumers makes all the difference. In such a case, the content must be processed so that the user can view the video clip in the next best format. For example, if the handset will not support video formats, the video clip will be played back based on the device's media capabilities, which in this case will result in a perfectly viewed slideshow.

So how does the new and exciting mobile rich content get to its destination? Once the content provider is ready to upload a new piece of content to the network, a new version needs to be created for each device, taking into consideration their attributes to maximize the user experience. An investment in content production and service launch requires that these offerings would reach as many users as possible. Offering content only for high-end users with smart mobile devices limits the service reach to only a handful number of the operator subscriber base. Content must be available to a much broader user base, especially as most subscribers today have at least 2.5G color phones. Operators cannot afford to invest in manually creating the content for numerous devices.

Content can be transformed through real-time, 'on-the-fly' transcoding of multiple content flavors that need to be adapted specifically according to handset capabilities. Once media adaptation and enhancement mechanisms are integrated within the

network, a single version of the content is uploaded to the operator environment, where the process of transcoding is performed automatically. Adopting the media adaptation model, operators can upload a single version of the rich media content. Such built-in adaptation automatically creates multiple versions of the content that serve customers and all types of devices.

Adaptation becomes an integral part of the natural flow of a mobile content management in the system, and operators can reach 100% of the potential customers (and capture bigger chunks of the Average Revenue Per User - ARPU) trying to consume this popular rich media content. Having such a system serving several applications means that mobile operators will lower the total cost of ownership, ensure better system performance resulting in higher user satisfaction and the ultimately increase revenues.

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