

Are you connected?

by Patrick Ng, Head of Carrier Relations, Asia, Cable & Wireless Worldwide

As use of mobile Internet devices such as smartphones and 3G dongles grows, more and more mobile subscribers want access to high data volume Internet applications via their mobile devices. Mobile Internet usage is growing faster than desktop Internet did, and more users will soon access the Internet via mobile devices than desktop PCs. This is driving an unprecedented increase in traffic on the mobile networks, but also driving mobile operators to heed the call for global IP connectivity.



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According to a recent study by leading analyst house Gartner, sales of smartphones represent the fastest growing area in the mobile market. With the launch of Apple's iPhone and Google's Android Mobile Device Platform, content and services such as instant messaging (MSN/Skype), video viewing (YouTube/Mobile TV), online auctions (eBay), social networking (MySpace/Facebook) and location-based services are being increasingly accessed via mobile as well as the PC.

The mobile Internet has witnessed explosive growth in the number of users due to the increasing popularity of mobile broadband and 3.5G. With the mobile phone becoming a true necessity and

the Internet a symbol of civilization and social engagement, mobile Internet is the magic wand to live a lifestyle in today's community. Consumers commonly use mobile Internet for services such as finance, news, sports and entertainment, leading to an unprecedented increase in traffic on mobile networks.

Some of the key mobile Internet trends witnessed during this growth:

Top categories

- Social Networks
- Instant Messaging
- Email
- Gaming
- Entertainment, Music & TV

- Mobile Search
- Enterprise Adoption

Mobile communication has become an integral part of our lives; consumers see it as both a 'life support' and 'life management' tool. Today's truly multifunctional mobile devices are being used throughout the day, every day, for many purposes. The sophistication and level of mobile Internet usage varies in each country. This is the result of many structural factors - such as data package pricing, mobile handsets, Internet bandwidth and WiFi availability - as well as cultural trends.

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kinds of services and applications, done in such a way that you don't even have to be familiar with the Internet to use them.

The BlackBerry is the de facto mobile devices in most enterprises for email, but with the popularity of the smartphone, and the speed at which it has entered the workplace, employees are pushing IT to support these handsets as well. Enterprise acceptance of smartphones, however, is likely to be a more complicated matter, with challenges such as managing and supporting the growing diversity of device types and managing the data security. Over the next two to three years, we believe that the wider adoption of smartphones in enterprises will be driven by the development of relevant business applications rather than email. Enterprises will use managed mobility more for its ability to enable applications and services that provide the companies with a competitive advantage.

All of this means that most mobile operators will have to do two things: upgrade their backhaul networks to allow for growing data usage on their networks; and upgrade their global IP connectivity to give customers access to content that resides in other countries.

Many incumbent carriers see mobile telephony slowly eating away at the fixed voice market, but at the same time, it creates opportunities for global network services providers. This global IP connectivity for the mobile operator is a growing market, primarily because everyone is getting mobile phones with data capabilities, and they want to access the Internet from those devices.

Massive data growth

The mobile phone will overtake the computer as the most common web access device worldwide by 2013, with more than 1.82 billion Internet-enabled phones in use, according to industry estimates. Cisco projects that mobile Internet traffic will double every year between now and 2013, when it will total an average of 2.2

million terabytes per month. The company says the biggest driver for the traffic increase will be video, which will account for roughly 64 per cent of all mobile data traffic in 2013. By 2013, video traffic will increase by more than 100 times and will average around 1.3 million TB per month.

Increasing smartphone penetration and emerging usage models (such as video/audio streaming) will stress an operator's wireless networks. Mobile operators may be able to address the surge via capacity upgrades and offloading to WiFi. Global IP connectivity, however, is likely to be the critical bottleneck for seamless mobile Internet services. Operators could be heading for mobile Internet congestion and innovative solutions such as tiered data pricing on speed and Quality of Service may prove to be longer-term strategies for sustained revenue growth.

The Asia Pacific market

Asia Pacific is a key growth market when it comes to Mobile Internet, with a constant pool of new users swelling the ranks of adopters. But there are other factors that we need to take into account when we define the APAC market. 'Asia Pacific' as a term is far less accurate than 'the wild west' given the huge cultural, economic, geographical and technology differences which exist in the region.

For example, the Japanese mobile market is vastly different to Thailand's mobile market while Singapore has more attributes of a Western state in terms of technological advances and adoption, which is seen in its mature consumer behaviour as well. So a one-size-fits-all approach does not work.

Will you remain connected?

The mobile Internet ecosystem is formed of media, advertisers, application developers, service providers or carriers, device manufacturers and technologies. With the exponential increase in mobile Internet adoption, there are both challenging and exciting times ahead

for communication service providers and global network providers alike - and potentially great benefits for customers. The focus will continue to revolve around providing a positive customer experience. Legacy systems will be overhauled, larger investments in the area of mobile apps development will continue, and adoption rates will continue to go north with better connectivity and faster networks. ●



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