Making the Complex Simple
– Delivering Ease of Use in the New Mobile Broadband Age

Key device categories driving this growth include computing-centric devices like netbooks, notebooks and laptops together with mobile handsets, personal navigation devices (PNDs), personal media players (PMPs), e-readers, high-end digital cameras and smart-phones.

For mobile operators, this trend brings obvious benefits. It gives them the opportunity to tap into incremental revenue streams and to cross-sell and build user loyalty. At the same time, it presents them with a range of complex challenges. The growth of mobile broadband and connected devices is driving related growth in prepaid subscriptions – increasingly popular with users because they help them to understand how much they are spending and consequently control usage costs.

From the operator perspective, the disadvantage of this surge in prepaid mobile broadband usage is that it makes it difficult for them to engage fully with customers while ensuring that the user experience remains as simple and straightforward as possible.

CUTTING THROUGH COMPLEXITY
Typically, if they are using the traditional pre-provisioning model for SIM cards, operators have no effective means of marketing to the prepaid end user. As the user will never have filled out a formal contract, so the operator will know nothing about them. Name, date of birth, home address and usage preferences are all likely to remain a mystery.

In contrast, by provisioning the SIM at the time of first use through a new approach known as Dynamic SIM Allocation (DSA), operators have an immediate opportunity for engagement, interaction and dialogue. They can gather any missing information and deliver tailored marketing messages and promotional incentives to the new subscribers.

The proliferation of mobile broadband and connected devices is making the market more complex. Using DSA enables operators to address this issue by becoming device aware and by tailoring their message depending on the device being targeted. After all, there is a major difference between the kind of marketing message suitable for delivery to a feature phone connected to a GPRS network and that appropriate for a mobile broadband network connected iPad with a large colour screen and multi-touch capability.

If the operator wants to provide the best user experience, it needs to understand the nature of the device with which it is engaging. The emergence of sophisticated connected solutions offers an opportunity, through the use of tools like DSA, to transform the way that operators market themselves to mobile subscribers by changing the nature of the user interface.

This is key if operators want to improve the overall customer experience. Laptop users could be taken automatically to an intuitive web landing page that can personalise according to their specific requirements, allowing them to choose suitable tariffs, price plans and data limits. This browser-based approach also opens up opportunities for the operator to promote its brand more effectively and to deliver high-impact and highly persuasive marketing campaigns.

However, such an approach might be entirely inappropriate for a BlackBerry user. The smaller form factor and screen render engagement over the web inappropriate and make the type of email message typically sent to traditional mobile phone users a better means of interaction. It is all about making the engagement process as simple and straightforward as possible for the end user.

The mobile broadband market continues to grow dynamically. A recent report by leading industry analyst, Analysys Mason argues that it will be one of the primary revenue drivers for European operators in the next five years, contributing almost 10 per cent of total mobile service revenue by 2015. The analyst forecasts that total mobile broadband revenue in Europe will increase from €6 billion in 2009 to €17 billion in 2015, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18.7 per cent. In addition, it projects that total mobile broadband connections will increase in number from 32 million in 2009 to almost 120 million in 2015, at a CAGR of 24.8 per cent in 2009–2015.

TALKING ABOUT TARIFFS
Another area where the dynamic growth in connected devices brings the potential for complexity is in pricing. The proliferation of devices brings with it a proliferation of different tariffs. Individual customers might have to manage different tariffs for each mobile device owned, from BlackBerry to laptop and from iPad to iPhone. Users often become confused as a result.

Lack of understanding of these schemes can lead to instances of bill shock where users get an unpleasant surprise when they receive payment demands through the post.

Again, operators can help here by making the engagement process as simple as possible. The operator needs to ensure it is promoting the right tariff for the right device and provide an intuitive process, which effectively guides the user into making the right choice. Operators that do this can minimise the confusion users feel and the fear that they have about making the wrong choice, helping to minimise the impact of bill shock and to make the engagement process more positive.

KEEPING IN CONTROL
Today, the ability to be device aware and customise the way that the message is presented to the user is increasingly important to operators. Just a decade ago, the vast majority of their users would have just been using standard mobile handsets.

Now, those same users are likely to have a wide array of devices from dongles for their laptop to iPads and from satellite navigation systems to MP3 players. As a result, many operators have the sense of losing control over their customers. They no longer have a clear concept of what devices their customers are using, let alone of how best to engage with them over those devices.

That is why the ability to use a solution that is device aware is so important in reducing complexity, making the engagement process as simple as possible and ultimately building user loyalty. As a result, the operator has a sense of restored control but the user is in control also. And both groups are well placed to benefit from the rapidly accelerating growth of the mobile broadband and connected device marketplace.

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