

## Quocirca's Straight Talking – Searching for Mobile Search

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'Finders keepers, losers weepers' - not only an old schoolyard chant and the lyrics of an Elvis Presley song but also a reasonable summary of the market for services delivered to smart mobile phones.

In that smallest but best connected personal device is the power to interact with all manner of content and services - news, weather, travel information, events listings - if only we could actually track them down.

As the amount of content available and variety of handsets grows, marketing it to mobile users becomes an increasing challenge. For each new service this poses the questions: How will a subscriber find it? Will it be tailored for mobile use? Will users want to use it?

If the number of potential services is limited to those available from a particular mobile operator's portal - O2 Active, Orange World, T-zones or Vodafone Live - the problem is less complex. The operator lines up things that work with the phones they supply and manages a fairly limited menu of options.

With a little intelligence about the user and their handset, content offerings can be tailored - for example, re-ordering menu links so that those the subscriber uses most are at the top, or removing those that will not work on a limited functionality handset.

Mobile operators are still overly protective, trying to encourage users to stay within the 'walled garden' of their own portal, with some imposing extra charges for 'off portal' content. While some argue restricted access to content can be good for the user experience, ultimately the walls will come down, and it will be necessary for operators, content providers and users to manage in a more complex environment.

For users looking for content beyond that offered by their mobile operator's portal on the wider 'mobile internet', the myriad of available options no longer fits into a simple list of menus. Thus internet search engines such as Google have teamed up with mobile operators to allow subscribers to bring desktop searching to mobiles - using a Google page to search for sites specifically designed for mobile devices, for instance.

Fine. Except on a mobile device immediate 'discovery' of a service is more preferable than repeated searching.

Ask yourself this: How often do you find what you're looking for on a search engine on the first page without having to refine the search with further keywords or click in and out of a couple of results along the way? And, according to Quocirca research conducted in 2005, almost 50 per cent of IT professionals think tiny keyboards and fiddly input mechanisms are a significant challenge for users of smart handheld devices. Mobile searching needs a little more direction.

While search is one way to help users find content, another is to give meaningful names to mobile web addresses. This works off a known name or brand so `www.somewhere.com` becomes `www.somewhere.mobi`.

The organisation putting its weight behind the .mobi domain, mTLD (Mobile Top Level Domain Ltd), is well supported by many investors including handset companies, operators and industry bodies. As part of its remit, it plans to issue guidelines for content providers to create content that is suitable for a mobile device.

This is still not a perfect solution, though. When searching for mobile content, many people will be looking for something that is relevant to a particular place, often their present location - the weather, news, timetables or nearest cash point.

Location solutions have mushroomed with sales of personal and in-car navigation systems but what about on a mobile phone? Mobile users need more than games or video clips. Combining location and search criteria to find something of interest nearby makes sense for a mobile user. These might not create perfect matches but if used intelligently could make content discovery easier for the user of a tiny mobile screen and keypad.

Overall the mobile handset landscape is more complex than the desktop. There is no single device platform, little commonality of input types or screen sizes and a variety of connection methods. Added to that, users have less time to search for content as their needs tend to be immediate.

So, getting back to that schoolyard chant - those whose content is easy to find will be the ones to keep the users, and those who lose users will be the ones to weep.

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is one of Europe's leading independent industry analyst firms. One of its biggest assets is the core team of highly experienced analysts drawn from both the corporate and the vendor communities. This team prides itself on maintaining a bigger picture view of what's going on in the IT and communications marketplaces. This allows all of Quocirca's activities to be carried out in the context of the real world and avoids distractions with fads, fashions and the nuts and bolts of specific technologies. Quocirca's focus has always been the point of intersection at which IT meets "the business".

## Quocirca Services

The insight and experience that comes from working as an industry analyst as well as a practitioner allows the Quocirca team to contribute significantly to IT Vendors, Service Providers and Corporate clients. To this end, it provides a range of consulting and advisory services. Details of these, along with some of Quocirca's latest analysis, may be obtained by visiting <http://www.quocirca.com>

Quocirca also provides bespoke primary research services through its daughter company QNB Intelligence. This involves interviewing thousands of senior decision makers on a quarterly basis.