

Straight Talking – Software for the other 5 billion

By Clive Longbottom, Service Director, Quocirca Ltd

Although there are well over six billion people on the planet, just a little over one billion have access to computers or the internet.

Given those one billion already provide big profits for tech giants such as Google and Microsoft, is there any point in bothering with the other 5?

Of course. Quocirca would pose it is more important to be concentrating our capabilities on these people. Technology can enable massive changes for the poorest people on the planet - and the impact can be the difference between life and death, not just success and failure.

With companies such as Cisco, Intel and Microsoft and organisations such as the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) foundation pushing to get devices into as many people's hands as possible, one missing piece remains: content.

Small-scale projects are providing fantastic content and software to discrete groups of people but these projects tend to be run on shoestring budgets, with the developers motivated more by philanthropy than by any dreams of financial recompense.

Already commercial companies are catching on to the fact these five billion people present an opportunity. But from what Quocirca has seen, their efforts so far leave much to be desired.

Here are seven assumptions developers should not make when creating applications and content for this new world of users.

1. Don't assume literacy

Literacy is taken as a given in many parts of the world, and yet figures show that even in those countries with full education systems, levels of functional literacy can be quite shocking. Indeed, UN figures show that 20 per cent of UK adults are functionally illiterate. Therefore, systems aimed at developing markets and poorer areas in mature

markets should be based more on visual and audio content than on text.

2. Don't assume latest technical capabilities

Many devices provided to developing areas will be on a subsidised or free basis, as the users will not be able to afford to buy them directly. Therefore, developers can't expect their software will be run on hardware with fast processors or good graphics capabilities. Products have to be kept cheap and simple.

3. Don't assume full connectivity

Despite the uptake of wireless connectivity in emerging markets, the 'always on' connection will remain a dream for the foreseeable future. While base content should be a centrally sourced and shared resource so it can be accessed by as many people as possible, it has to be fully replicated to distributed systems - and streaming will not be a workable way forwards for some time.

4. Don't assume device consistency

In mature markets, users can be expected to use the right device for the job. But in emerging markets it has to be assumed a user will have access to a single (probably shared) device - and that this device could be a basic mobile phone, or a simple laptop or desktop machine. Applications and content must be accessible from such different devices.

5. Don't assume money means anything

Quocirca often hears that 'x' per cent of people in such-and-such a geography are surviving on less than \$1 per day. So what? If housing is self-built from locally sourced renewable products, food is grown by the person themselves, clothing

is made from locally sourced materials and energy comes from renewable sources, money of any quantity is useless.

So don't look at how your software or content will help the user become a millionaire - look at how it will help them do what they want to do better.

6. Don't assume step-wise aspirations

In mature markets, most people aspire to advance through a career path, gaining greater responsibilities and cash with each move. In the emerging markets, it may be better to look at a more linear progression - for instance, how can a farmer become a more effective farmer?

7. Don't assume thought processes are the same as yours

This is a biggie: because the software developers come from a democratic country, with free thought and the desire to do well financially and socially, often they think this framework is the one emerging markets should aim for too. This can alienate potential users. Content and applications have to be contextually sensitive to be useful.

For many in the world, basic needs for survival and growth are the main focus of daily life. Trying to address the higher aims before those basic needs have been addressed will never work. Only once you provide better survival capabilities can individuals take a more inclusive view of their future.

Although there is not a massive amount of money to be made from emerging markets, micro amounts from non-governmental agencies, aggregated user groups and so on can lead to significant financial success when brought together over a possible five-billion-strong user base.

The trick is to be in it for the long game - not just for the quick win.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at
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