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Position paper for the W3C "Mobile Web Initiative" Workshop

Introduction

As mobile devices become even smarter, users are given the choice to do more than simple calls by accessing a variety of services provided by wireless operators. However, technologies like web browsing have not been able to fulfill the promise of the mobile digital age so far. Various web technologies, starting with WAP, were developed to facilitate access to content from mobile devices but initially missed solving the challenges posed by the constraints of the wireless world, especially the quality of communications. Now that extensive efforts have been spent to improve network responsiveness, many bet on the upcoming higher bandwidths of wireless networks to remove what we think is the latest barrier to mobile web browsing adoption. Although reliable data connectivity is a necessity, we believe that the data experience is fundamentally different on a mobile device than on a desktop computer, as it is with messaging like SMS. We believe that a major answer to the success of mobile Web browsing resides not only on the technology but also in providing valuable web content for this specific class of users and improving their overall experience in their search for information.

Some key challenges

Mobile devices are different from desktops. Perhaps five to ten years from now, mobile devices will have screens and configurations similar to desktop computers with technologies like flexible screens. Today, they are simply different and have specific constraints: small screens, unreliable coverage with high network latency, etc. We believe in the necessity to evangelize a solutions approach that increases the acceptance of mobile Web browsing and awareness of websites that are particularly designed for mobile users. This can include the advertising of "mobile friendly" web

sites, evangelizing the web content bellwethers to make search engines and their results more adapted to wireless devices, etc... Some efforts have been created but remain too few. If it takes too many steps for a wireless user to just get to the specific wireless friendly section of a search engine then it fails short of user expectations. With millions of Palm Powered devices in the market, we are particularly interested in evangelizing some of these ideas to our customers and our developer community, especially web content developers.

First focus on the user. Mobile users are by definition on the go. The type of information and the way they want to get it are different from web browsing on a desktop. While many are afraid that developing targeted content and using different technologies can lead to Web fragmentation, we believe that Web fragmentation has already occurred: wireless carriers are offering their own content to mobile users sometimes separated from the rest of the World Wide Web. That said, we believe that the true challenge lies in the value of the content to the user as much as the technologies themselves. We also believe that wireless operators will be key participants to the Mobile Web Browsing success and that the Mobile Web Initiative should bring all the mobile community together to evangelize the creation of content that makes sense to mobile users. As a key member of this industry, we are particularly interested in this venue.

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