

Mobile Web in India

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India has over 50 million internet users. The Mobile usage growth tops the charts with the maximum monthly additions worldwide – today there are over 128 million mobile subscribers. Various surveys have indicated good demand for additional services to be delivered to these mobile and internet users – e.g. 47% of users would pay for mobile content like alerts, ring-tones, wallpaper etc¹. Clearly the time is ripe for the mobile web to fuel the next phase of growth. The usage of Mobile Web has been available in other markets for a long time now. The key to the adoption of Mobile Web in developing countries is to learn from other markets as well as innovate suitably to meet local needs. Augmenting existing standards with such learning is the key to ensure interoperability and hence can make this growth sustainable.

Learning from other markets

We see the following as the key roadblocks to rapid adoption of the mobile web

- Internet access is for certain tiers of products and plans only : normally restricted to the high tier phones
- Setup is complicated
- Content reformatting is overdone

We believe it is important to drive the usage to the low tier phones for it to be ubiquitous in developing countries. Setup should be simplified by using more OTA based mechanisms

Requiring the content to be reformatted for each device and service provider leads to delays in certain content being available on all devices / markets simultaneously. Adoption of suitable mobile web standards could result in limiting customizations. Newer technologies like SVG can also contain this problem to some extent.

Development of content authoring guidelines as part of recommendations that address mobile content development can help in this regard.

Leveraging Indian languages

Language: develop local content providers to provide content which is relevant locally in the local language

Interaction: In general, interactive web browsing, especially where the end user is expected to complete forms is very complicated on a handheld. Predictive text and other input enhancements for Indian languages are not yet widely available. These should be brought in. Other modalities of interaction like voice should be encouraged as a means for effective user interaction.

Standards can actively incorporate extensions that handle peculiarities of Indian languages.

Recent advances that help bridge some gaps

One key problem of effective mobile browsing is the speed of the browsing experience. Oftentimes the bandwidth is very limited and the resulting user experience can discourage the users from using the mobile web. Recently, others models of content delivery have emerged which help get over this problem to some extent

¹ Internet and Mobile Association of India; <http://www.iamai.in/>; last accessed October 26, 2006.

Use of alternate mechanisms for service delivery: HTML/SVG content, for popular services like cricket scores can be delivered by cell broadcast to the device. The device can still render rich content in a form visually appealing to the user. This prevents tens of thousands of subscribers trying to clog the network during popular events

Services can also be delivered by a combination of push and pull technologies: Servers can send a push to devices to trigger a pull back from the device to retrieve actual content. Servers can do this during network off-peak times to ensure that networks are not clogged.

Standards can address combination of existing standards and creation of new ones to address the above mentioned use-case.