

## FOSTERING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COMMERCIAL SOLUTIONS

The sheer number of experiments, trials and pilot projects in trying to make an inclusive impact on society through Mobile Technology is amazing. The variety of projects, the domains they cover ranging from healthcare to education, banking to farming information and more and the number of countries involved show how fertile this field is. The number of NGOs who have discovered the possibilities of Mobile Technology is innumerable. What stands out, however, is the rather noticeable lack of commercial projects which are not only making a positive social impact but also generate revenue for the organizations behind them.

This could be due to a few reasons – 1) the social impact of basic mobile telephony is so profound that everything else has a relatively small impact. 2) there is a feeling that while these experiments can become commercially viable in the future, there isn't a point thinking about revenue now and 3) the assumption that services which are socially relevant are inherently in conflict with mobile operators' interests.

We, at Bharti Telesoft, believe that not only is it possible to work with operators in fostering social development but that there is a strong business case around this here and now. There are a few case studies that we describe here that support this - 1) Electronic Prepaid Topup 2) Music-on-demand 3) Ring-back tone 4) Mobile Widgets

### ANYWHERE, ANYTIME, ANYVALUE RECHARGE

The advent of Electronic Prepaid Topup has changed the prepaid market beyond recognition. The problems and costs of distributing scratch cards, the resultant need to have high minimum recharge values and the need to transport them in good condition physically to remote places were a big hurdle for subscribers. Electronic Topup has solved all these problems for good. Recharge amounts can be as low as 20 Rs (0.40 USD) now allowing more frequent, demand based topup conserving cash for many low users. While solving these problems, it has created a whole new industry – the small value retail chain.

### CROSS COUNTRY FM, ANYONE?

FM is available only in a very few cities in India. The rest of the country has access to only AM radio, which has programming that can at best be described as unappetising. CD players (or cassette players for that matter) are not only not affordable, but need continuing expenditure to use. The only mechanism for people in most of the country to access music (and even more so, music of *their* choice) is via their phones. Where GPRS doesn't exist, no other mechanism for sideloading songs are available the only answer is voice call. Music via IVR has become the unexpected vehicle of entertainment for a large section of India.

## THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE TONE THAT DOESN'T PLAY

When a phone does not allow downloading of ringtones (or is too difficult to do so) or wallpapers what other means exists for them to express their personality? The economically weaker sections who have found a magic tool in the mobile phone want to use it not just for calls but have made it their primary status symbol, the thing which defines their personality. These people are amongst the most regular users of Ring Back Tone – the only possibility to personalize their phone. Social development is not just about helping them do their work better, or give them more livelihood options, but fill the gaps in their entertainment.

## MOBILE INTERNET FOR THE MASSES, FINALLY?

Browsers are getting more powerful and getting the full internet on the mobile phone; handsets are morphing to touch screens and slick interfaces; and there are still plenty of people for whom discovering and reaching websites which may be relevant to them, navigating within what can be intimidating layouts of those pages and reaching the piece of information they want is still an impossible task. And if they somehow make it happen once, its a proposition expensive enough to prevent them from trying again. Mobile widgets seem to be the answer. While delivery of the widgets still remains a challenge, the reduction in bandwidth and simplicity of navigation are sufficiently valuable to possibly be the answer to how Mobile Internet can be delivered to the masses.

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