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### **Chapter 6: Mobile Media Un-Control in Your Pocket!**

Remember when, a decade ago, being online meant sitting at a large, loud, and ugly machine that was tethered to a wire that got you the digital juice? Now return to today, where the Net lives in our pockets, inside silent, slick, always-on devices that are getting cheaper by the minute, propelled by bandwidth and storage costs that are plunging as well. What a difference this is making to how we consume media! Zoom forward another ten years and you'll see Control of Media faded in the rearview mirror, a tiny blip thousands of miles behind you.

You will also see Anglo-American media dominance fade: Recent Infonetics statistics show that worldwide, 47% of mobile subscribers come from the Asia-Pacific region; 36% come from Europe, Africa, and the Middle East; and a mere 9% come from North America. Geographical differences, electrical power issues, and a lack of wired infrastructure mean that many people will see their first webpage on a mobile device, not on a computer.

So, first, two clarifications:

1. A mobile phone is a computer is a media device is a copy machine is a radio is a broadcast tower — here, today, now. This mind-jarring convergence of devices and previously separate realms of technology is already upon us, and will be even more pronounced in the future. And yes, there will be no single user interface, no single type (or brand) of device that will dominate, like the good old transistor radio did. Instead, people of different ages, in different cultures, and in different locations will buy many different types of devices, some bundled with content, some not. Fifteen-year old kids in America may buy slick devices that are interconnected but mostly not used as telephones, 22-year-olds in Asia will want online chat rooms, virtual worlds, and VoIP-calling fully integrated. But either way, this is certain: the days of the single-purpose, stand-alone (i.e., disconnected) media player are over, and so is any chance to control what content can be stored in it. Technology has already led the quest for total control into absurdity; now we have to be smarter to generate some trust-based “control” (what I have come to think of as Trustol★) in this new system.

*“The handset will be the world’s Internet platform, and it will be open.” —GigaOm*

2. There is no such thing as the “mobile Web” — no special place to go if you’re on your mobile, no special technology to use, no plug-in to install, no special way of accessing the Net. There are, of course, vast differences in design and user interfaces (driven by size, power restraints, and display types), as well as wide-reaching differences in user behavior. And therefore, different kinds of content will be successful in different contexts. But when we talk about mobile media, we can no longer assume some sort of separate realm that is cordoned off the overall Net. Therefore, any hopes that mobile media will not go where the Web has already gone — albeit in a mostly tethered, desktopped, crude kind of way — are not realistic. Moreover, any hope of “protecting content” (a pitiful euphemism for setting up hurdles to somehow wrest unavoidable payments from the users) now seem quite far-fetched. Far better just to make the content available and meter its use.

### **A Third Dimension in Change: Time, Place & Location Shift**

Mobility is now the major driver in media, and this trend will become even stronger. First the People Formerly Known as Consumers★ got used to time-shifting (via cassette recorders, TiVo, VCRs, and DVRs), then they came to like place-shifting (witness Slingbox, Avvenue, SongBirdNest, et. al.), and now they can get it all, anywhere, anytime, even while moving around — and for what feels like free★!

Media companies used to be able to control not just what and when we consumed, but also where: whether in front of the TV (i.e., the living room), in the car (as with terrestrial radio), or, more recently and in a already much lesser way, in front of that clunky, tethered desktop computer. In the future, most of these tried-and-tested means of control are toast: People will consume their media when they want, how they want, and where they want — and chances are it will be while they are on the move, with the only real distinguishing factor remaining their customized user interface, their personal media canvas.

Now put yourselves in the shoes of a major media company, and you’ll get a glimpse of the annoying headaches this immanent change is sure to produce. Just tell yourself, “Most of my users — the people formerly known as consumers — will start using mobile devices for their basic content needs within the next five years, and the harder I make it for them to get my content, the less I will matter to them.” Loss of mattering equals loss of audience equals loss of revenues. Are you with me so far?

### **Got Trustol?**

Just like every phone now also has a camera (and if not, it is by design, not by omission), every mobile device and every phone will soon be constantly connected to the Internet as well, and we will come to think of them as those little boxes that can do pretty much the same things as our good old desktop computers. The only difference will be the interface, of course — and that is where some elements of what I have come to call Trustol★ (i.e., some element of user control based on trust) comes back in.

Creators and their representatives (managers, media companies, and rights organizations) must therefore act urgently on the basic fact that all media is rapidly moving to mobile devices rather than being confined to computers or traditional media boxes such as TV and radio. If you thought it was hard to control what people do with

your content on the computer, you should think again: Mobile devices will make this look like a walk in the park, with media-sharing via those “boxes formerly known as computers” representing only the tip of that 1,000-foot iceberg.

### **The Default Media 2.0 Box is the Mobile**

While only ten years ago mobile devices meant cell phones, PDAs, or MP3 players, today mobile devices are full-fledged computers. In many newly developing countries, in fact, many users will never even buy one of those Media 1.0 boxes. They will use mobile devices to listen to music, access the Web, connect to favorite social networks, watch TV shows and movies, and connect with each other at the same time. The previously disconnected media-playing device has now become part of the connected ecosystem — see the iPod Touch or Nokia N95. Soon, it will be hard to tell whether a device makes phone calls via the cellular network or via the Internet, connected through Wi-Fi or WiMAX. In fact, the very definition of “phone call” will likely be rewritten, since it’s not longer a phone making a call but just a mobile computer calling another mobile computer, “phone” UI or not.

### **Mobile Control-Stoppers**

Let’s consider the crucial characteristics of mobile devices and why they are control-stoppers in the purest form:End of Control logo

1. They connect to high-speed data networks and the Internet.
2. They connect to the devices of other users, whether nearby or virtually local.
3. They offer instant communication and sharing with other users (as well as other computers).
4. They can do something on the go that used to require a fixed location, i.e., bookmark a song, image, or text; exchange tags or feeds; scan a bar-code; record and distribute a video; listen to digital radio; record and distribute audio, etc.

It is these endless combinations and possibilities that make mobile devices so powerful and habit-forming (and thereby impossible to control): All of a sudden we can read our customized, always-updated newsfeeds anywhere, anytime (including offline); we can identify songs we like, bookmark them and download them when near a broadband; we can pull up maps of favorite locations and send them to anyone on our buddy list; we can shoot a video and send it to our friends or upload it to a media portal; we can remix a ringtone and Bluetooth it to anyone in range.

Mobility is blowing the top off the house of cards that was “controlled media”; it’s the final nail in the coffin of DRM, TPM and whatever other M’s were cooked up in those disconnected ivory towers. With a click on the button, we are now connecting via the cellular networks, via Bluetooth, via cable, via WiMAX, via HD and DAB chips...and that’s only the beginning. With the price of some high-end mobile devices already surpassing cheap laptops and desktop computers, it is not surprising that mobile device capabilities are exceeding computers now as well, with the next big frontiers being fuel cells and new display technologies.

Now, it’s no longer the mere access we long for, it’s to have someone solve the Paradox of Choice for us: too much, too quick, too-many-options media content will pose much

more significant challenges than getting access ever did. (I'll address this opportunity in my upcoming chapter on the Paradox of Choice.)

### **Digital Natives: Hyper-Powered by Mobile Media Devices**

Just imagine these powerful mobile devices in the hands of those pesky digital natives, the download generation, the echo-boomers: Five hundred gigabytes of media at their instant disposal as they roam public places, eat in a restaurant, or sit in a subway car. Instant connections made with buddies and new friends, on the spur of the moment. Music passed around like personal greeting cards, music being remixed by several users simultaneously, and then uploaded to their favorite social networks. On-demand streams of music and video, provided by more than a billion people who mingle on thousands of social networks. New mobile media applications will be developed that will make Shawn Fanning's original Napster look like a Model-T Ford, with installs of hundreds of millions for the hottest apps not unthinkable.

This is, naturally, manna from heaven for the hardware manufacturers, the companies that make these devices formerly called phones: people who want to connect, communicate, share, listen, and watch — while on the move — everywhere on the planet. And once the already omnipresent digital content actually is blessed with legality, in the form of blanket licenses and flat rates, it will be a boon for the telcos, too. (I discuss this in my upcoming chapter "Telco 2.0: More Dollars with Less Control.")

If we can say one thing for certain it is that any restriction that could possibly reduce the users' power will be avoided like the plague. Competition will be fierce, and with sales in the hundreds of millions of units, the profit potential is significant and any impediment to fast user adoption would be suicide. In other words, no mobile device or handset manufacturer, or operator, will risk alienating their users with content-protection related malware or other software hurdles; rather, the enormous potential of mobile media will further accelerate the adoption of flat-rated content and connectivity models — starting with music. (See Chapter 4.)

### **Media Is the Mobile Lubricant**

Now and in the future, media content is that crucial lubricant that drives the ever-increasing use and ever-faster adoption of new devices (and their related services); it's the oil in the engine of communications, and the higher the performance of the device, the better the oil must be.

Looking at the first few groundbreaking devices that fit the "mobile computer" category, such as the Apple iPhone, Nokia N95, and Samsung F330, it is already quite apparent where this is going: more powerful means of media consumption and communication (which means more sharing, all the time), lesser restrictions designed to spur large-scale user adoption, and a seriously increasing pace of device convergence. Get ready to make Skype calls on your PSP, watch live television on your iPhone, listen to KCRW or Danish Radio or the BBC on your Oakley MP3 sunglasses, and receive RSS feeds on your wristwatch.

While Apple may, for now, try to cling to a tight control over what new iPhone and iPod applications can be developed and offered, I would already consider it a key "EoC Moment" when Apple concedes that it must actually open the iPhone platform to outside

developments and make an SDK available. I predict that in the long run even their control concerns will fade. If indeed they want to become a truly dominant player in this turf and not just a cool, exclusive brand for individualists, they will have no choice but to open up their nicely walled gardens.

Watch for Apple to compete directly with Nokia, Samsung, LG, and Motorola for dominance in mobile entertainment and communication devices — and my bet would be on Nokia since it has the most longterm view of what it wants to do, the most balanced culture-vs.-business mindset, and the sheer tenacity that will be required to address a myriad of issues. But then again, there is Google....

### **Caveat Emptor: Will Mobile Media Promote a Blip Culture?**

Clearly, mobile media will be subject to even more competition for attention than media consumed on those big boxes in our living rooms. While you scan the news feeds on your mobile device, a new text message may arrive, a Bluetooth-powered friend may want to connect, or some location-based service may make itself known — and all this while your customized Internet radio station is playing and your emails are coming in. The user's attention will be seriously contested, and that may change the way that people package the content they send.

Whether this is for the better or the worse remains to be seen. But a real concern is that due to the level of "attention competition," any content that is too deep, too ambitious, or simply too long would fall by the wayside — and that would severely dilute the quality of media offerings.

*In the meantime: Be mobile, be liquid — or be gone.*

