



MOBILE POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Why the mobile internet is changing
the face of brand communication

December 2010

The mobile internet has transformed access to information, entertainment and social networks; it is also dramatically changing the role of commercial communications.

This paper summarizes the main findings from a six-country study by MEC, using our proprietary online qualitative research tool, DigiFaces™.

Why do we never leave the house without our mobile phones?

House keys; wallet; mobile phone. It's hard to imagine now, but it wasn't always like this. For many people, mobile devices have become an essential part of daily life; that much is obvious. What is less obvious is the intense emotional connection some people have with the actual object itself – the handset.

With the increase in what manufacturers coldly refer to as 'handset functionality', we have put more and more of ourselves into this go-anywhere repository of personal meaning, to the point where it feels like an extension of who we are. And with the migration of the internet to that device, this connection is becoming deeper still.

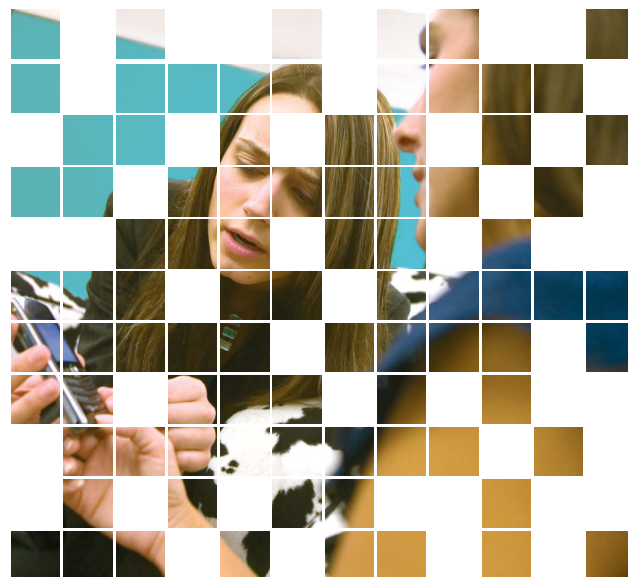


I consider the internet an extension of who I am.

DigiFaces™ respondent



Our social ties have always been vitally important to us. But the combination of an emotional connection with the handset, the ways we can maintain and enhance these social ties and the possibility of using the internet wherever we are, as our mood dictates, is making mobile internet access the latest essential of modern life.



Your brand needs to give me something

In order to nourish our vital social ties, we need something to say – what’s often called ‘social currency’. The use of social currency is how we maintain our presence and status within online communities like Facebook; what we contribute online affects how we are perceived by others: I contribute therefore I am.

This raises some important questions for brands who want to use social media to engage people: if status within online communities is derived from what you contribute, *what is your brand contributing?* How are you helping people maintain or increase their status? What brand-related content can you offer that will give them social currency to pass on to others?

More than ever, brands must offer a range of engaging content that is available whenever people want or need it.

The ability to be ‘always on’ means people feel ready to face any event but also expect rapid and relevant responses from companies to changes in situations.

For example, mobile search is changing how we shop, making pricing transparent. For a real-world retailer that might mean matching a price that a shopper has just found elsewhere using Google Goggles on their mobile phone.

“**When it comes to buying expensive products in shops, I always check Google’s online comparison website before purchasing. Usually you can get the exact item cheaper online.**”

DigiFaces™ respondent

The empowering role of the mobile internet

“**Without mobile internet, I would be lost a whole lot more, late for everything, a bit worse off [financially], and probably broken down where I had run out of petrol.**”

DigiFaces™ respondent

More broadly, mobile internet access is beginning to encourage increased political engagement, allowing citizens to quickly and easily deal with issues that concern them. For example, Fixmystreet.com allows UK residents to post pictures of local issues that need ‘fixing’ in their neighborhood. These problems are then picked up by the local government authority, which promises to quickly address them.

WATCHMEN: CREATING CONVERSATIONS



The challenge for launching Paramount Pictures’ highly anticipated *Watchmen* was to engage both the fans of the original graphic novel, and the larger audience who had never read it. Given the passion of the book’s existing fans, any communication had to let people make up their own minds about the film, without feeling like an ‘official’ promotion. The key was to provide enough social currency for different audiences to talk among themselves about the film. During a three-month period, over 60 different pieces of content, including videos, games, screensavers, widgets, banners and iPhone apps, were spread throughout the web, resulting in what *Total Film* magazine called, “the best viral campaign ever.” The film opened in the number one slot in 25 countries.

Mobile multi-tasking affects people's attention levels

The arrival of mobile internet means the end of dead time for some, as it allows them to find value in 'non-places' such as public transport, train stations, airports and so on.

This creates an increasingly familiar problem for advertisers wishing to engage people: their audience isn't paying attention. The ability to connect to our social networks anywhere means that where we are no longer dictates what we do. Given that advertisers buy out-of-home media based on recency and contextual relevance, this needs addressing.

The effect of mobile media on people's attention puts renewed emphasis on arresting, engaging ideas that can bring people back to the moment. It also highlights the continuing value of interruptive communication. However, interrupting people on their actual mobile device is problematic.

Mobile is a 'pull' not a 'push' medium; mobile interruptions are too intrusive

Previous MEC research (*Pay Attention, Please!*) looked at the effects of partial attention on people's engagement with advertising. It showed that many of us are often in a state of continuous partial attention, on the lookout for something more interesting than what we're currently doing. When we're in this state, we're open to relevant or engaging interruption by brands (see also MEC's *The Interruptibles*).

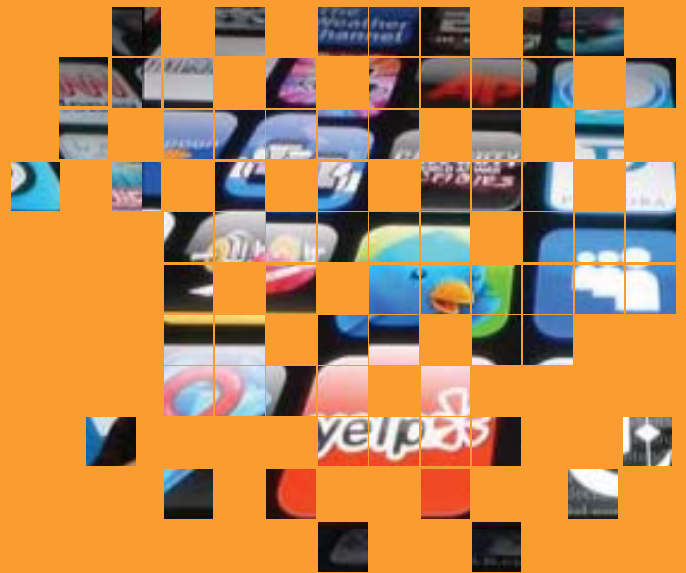
However, just because someone is looking for something more interesting doesn't mean they want to hear from you. This latest research shows that interruptions on a mobile device can be more intrusive than in other forms of communication because of the intense personal association with the device. Conversations and communication on a mobile device, whether for business or pleasure, may be too intimate or important to be interrupted.

MAKING MOBILE WORK FOR BRAND COMMUNICATION

The speed of mobile-internet adoption has surprised many people, and some predict that within three to five years more people will connect to the web via mobile than by desktop PC. Brand communication (including owned media, such as websites) must be created with that in mind.

People may be open to interruptions while using their mobile device, but rarely on the device itself. Consider location-specific, out-of-home interruption instead.

New forms of 'pull' communication, such as Apple iAds, give people the opportunity to choose which rich media they interact with. Give people liquid content that they can see when and where it suits them, and which gives them social currency to share with others.



Mobile power to the people was written by MEC's Analytics and Insight team. Research was conducted using c.180 qualitative interviews on our DigiFaces™ online qualitative tool and an online quantitative study of 1,250 individuals in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, Spain and Sweden.

Contact

For further information, please contact:

Damian Thompson
Head of Consumer Insight
Analytics and Insight, Global
Tel: +44 20 7803 2138
damian.thompson@mecglobal.com