



Hannah Summers says that widgets are what's needed to improve discoverability on phones

The little mobile screen has a harder job to do than ever before. It acts as a window to the worlds of the device, the operator portal and ever-more-sophisticated apps and content, as well as being a shop window for multiple handset, operator and content brands. Just look at the way mobile content has evolved in recent years. A few years ago, operators were suffering from a lack of compelling content. Today they are challenged with too much content and no easy way for their subscribers to discover it.

But although subscribers are being offered more choice and possibilities than ever, they are turned off by phone and portal navigation that requires multiple clicks and the negotiating of submenus. As handsets have become more complex, users have become overwhelmed by their capabilities and navigation complexity.

Operators have sought to increase consumer engagement by boosting their mobile search capabilities, but this doesn't solve the problem of how to make the most of the small and limited real estate presented by the mobile device and how to deliver simple and immediate experiences to users.

Simple applications known as "widgets" have gained a strong foothold in the PC environment and might hold the key to solving the complex challenges of mobile usability, branding and content discovery. Commonly appearing as small icons in a launcher on the idle screen or as complete applications, widgets can perform a range of functions across a wide variety of scenarios.

They are used by device makers to create distinctive devices that can be easily customized for different market requirements and by operators to custom-brand devices and the service-usage experience. End-users can also use widgets to personalize their devices, service selection and usage experience.

The key to the strength of widgets is that they are relatively small and simple and perform specific functions that are easy to use. They commonly include live information or media delivered from the service provider over a network on demand, on an assigned schedule or triggered by an event.

Widgets give the service provider a means of delivering highly relevant information, services and recommendations to users with minimal user action or learning. The navigation model is based on

selecting relevant information and services rather than using search tools, hierarchical menu systems or complex commands and controls to find services and media of interest.

Widgets also play a key role in device user-interface branding and differentiation. The mobile device itself is one of the most important elements in service success, creating the experience and delivering services and media to the end-user. Users want personalized products. Operators want customized, differentiated, branded products that provide consistency across their device and service portfolios.

Device suppliers need to produce great, competitive products in high volumes to be successful, but device customization is time-consuming and expensive, and personalization requires significant product flexibility.

Building for the masses

As a result, manufacturers have difficulty providing customized products, and operators must settle for what they can get within their time and budget constraints. Users end up being offered a limited number of products that are designed and built to address the broadest possible customer base.

Widgets can be used to "mass customize" products for markets, and operators can personalize the products, services and style for individual users. User-interface elements that are normally hard-coded in the device and difficult to change can be improved and easily modified to order, using the flexibility of a widget-based product. This yields economic advantages of mass production by making use of common components and platforms.

Widgets provide the ability to mass-customize devices, craft a differentiated service portfolio, personalize devices and services, and tailor the experience to individual users, while maximizing the economics of volume production. The challenge for the mobile industry is to extend the benefit of these lightweight apps into the mobile market and use this momentum to drive adoption of mobile data services and real customer engagement. MM

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