

Generation Web

Part 3: Going Mobile

Nick Sharp

The Internet in your Pocket

So far, I've talked about the way the internet is at present. Now I want to ask, where is all this going in the future? Well, with the usual caveats about "No one knows what's around the corner" being even more than usually applicable to the fast changing world of the internet, everyone seems to be agreed that the main change in the next five years will be going mobile.

Here, the pace of development is faster than anywhere else. Marketing people have managed to create a new necessity for us over the last decade – no one must be without their mobile phone. But it isn't just a phone, it plays music, takes pictures, surfs the web, and, thanks to the iPhone and similar smartphones, is poised to take the place of your computer.

This would suggest that the sort of immersive online worlds such as Second Life will not be taking over quite as much as was once thought. It is hard to be fully immersed in an experience when it is mediated through a hand-held screen. Instead, the emphasis is much more on instant networking and interaction.

Future trends in mobile technology

Already it is possible to update one's Facebook profile from a phone, to pay for goods by passing your phone over an electronic reader instead of having to use your credit card, and locating yourself to within a metre or so via GPS. Around the corner there will be technologies that capitalise on these capabilities. For instance, your phone will be able to tell you that your friends are currently having coffee in Starbucks, and invite you to join them. As you walk past Next on your way, you will receive a text saying "Hi! You're just passing our door right now. We'd like you to know that if you pop in now, there's a 10% discount on [*product we think you'll like, based on your shopping habits*] for the next 15 minutes." You ignore this, and walk into the café. It's crowded, and you can't see your friends so you hold up your phone

and scan it round. The Facebook profiles of your friends pop up, superimposed on the camera's image of the people in the café. You sit down at their table, and there in front of you is the skinny latte you ordered and paid for online as you were heading for Starbucks.

The web will be different once it's mainly accessed from a mobile device. One key difference is multi-tasking. We already live in an interrupt-driven culture. Research shows that most workers spend less than three minutes working on one task before they turn to another, and it is usual for young people to combine doing their homework with 3 or 4 instant message conversations going on simultaneously, texting someone else on their phone, playing music and possibly gaming – all at once.

The internet will become a normal part of life, rather than something extraordinary and special. Like having a cup of coffee in one hand, and the internet in the other. We have a stereotyped image of a person sitting on their own in front of a screen cut off from real interaction. But the web will become even more social, used with others, not alone.

Implications and dangers

This has got really profound implications for our young people. As I'm going to say later, the internet carries its dangers. Traditionally, parents have been encouraged to look after their children online, to make sure that they use a computer in a family room, not in their bedrooms, so they keep an eye on what their children are up to online, and so on. All this advice is soon to be rendered obsolete, because we will be carrying the internet in our pocket.

Most young people require surgery in order to be detached from their phones – if you're a parent, you'll know what I mean. But now we need to realise that they will need surgery to be detached from the internet.

Think about the implications of this. Children as young as five are given a phone, so potentially they will have free access to the internet as soon as they've learnt how to read. Next year, it is predicted that smartphones will outsell PCs, and by the end of 2011, it is estimated that sales of smartphones will account for 40% of the mobile phone market.

Perhaps you think that's wonderful, and in some ways it is, but it follows from this that parents and other responsible adults have lost our last chance to exercise control over our children's use of the internet. Now, all we have left is influence. The days of control have gone. All we can do is educate, suggest and influence. We need to use that influence carefully and well

Everybody's welcome

Janet Bird

'Whenever you enter a town and the people welcome you, eat what is set before you .. and say to them "The kingdom of God has come near to you". But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into the streets and say "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you"...' Luke 10 8-11

As individuals and as a Church, just how welcoming are we? How actually do we define "welcome" and "welcoming"? How well do we know other members of our existing congregation? What do we do to welcome newcomers? These were just some of the questions raised during the recent Everybody's Welcome course attended by representatives of all of the Team churches.

Certainly a big, reassuring smile and a warm 'Hello' is a good start when a new face comes through the door. But surely it starts before that. Does it not actually start with making others, be it friends, neighbours, total strangers or even family, feel that we would welcome them to join with us at Church?

When they do come, the building itself, just like all of the people inside, needs to exude

a homely, visitor friendly ambience, that they can feel part of without feeling threatened or pressurised. How inviting are our church buildings, both inside and out? Are our service times and forms of worship the most attractive we can find to encourage greater numbers to attend on a regular basis? This is a question that we are currently addressing at All Saints with the introduction of 'Prayers and Bears' and 'Messy Church'

How many of us actually notice new faces and make the effort to make them feel at home? When did you last ask a visitor whether they wanted help with the service book and move to sit beside them? When did you last make a point of getting them a cup of coffee after the service and having a chat to find out more about them and tell them more about the church? Are we on speaking terms with, and can we put names to every existing church member's face? If not, how can we introduce them to newcomers who may share similar interests?

We have made a good effort at All Saints to cater for the needs of people with disabilities with our disabled toilet, large print books and service sheets and we have a hearing loop- but we need to make newcomers aware that they are available.

When did you last make any newcomer to the church feel so welcome that they were eager to come again? We may be shy or afraid of making the first move – but there is nothing better than going to a new church where you are made to feel welcome. How good are we at following up new contacts by inviting them back or to join particular groups within our churches and making them feel at ease when they do so?

Being a welcoming church is the responsibility of us all and attending the Everybody Welcome Course is a good way of learning more about what we can do and giving us the confidence to do so. I would encourage everybody in the congregation to consider joining the next course which we are hoping to hold in the Autumn.