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Title : Analysts say more people using cellphones to access the Net
By :
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SINGAPORE : Changing trends in mobile phone penetration are having an impact on the way the Internet is being accessed.

With emerging markets leading the growth in mobile phone sales, analysts said cellphones are becoming a key means to logging onto the Net, surpassing the personal computer (PC).

For professionals in developed countries like Singapore, the mobile Web may just be an extension of their PC Internet.

But in developing markets like Thailand, India and the Philippines, where Internet penetration is still low, mobile phones are becoming a key means to getting connected.

Data released recently by Frost & Sullivan showed the wide disparity of mobile phone versus Internet penetration.

In 2007, Philippines' mobile penetration reached 56 per cent but Internet penetration was at 15.4 per cent; in Thailand it was 71 per cent versus 13 per cent; in Vietnam it was 70 per cent versus 21.4 per cent.

"In India it was 20.3 per cent versus 5.3 per cent; in Sri Lanka it was 37.8 per cent versus 2 per cent; in Pakistan it was 44 per cent versus 7.3 per cent, while in Bangladesh it was 22.6 per cent versus 0.3 per cent.

Krishna Baidya, Industry Analyst, Frost & Sullivan, said: "If we look at some of the emerging markets in the region, it (user-generated content) has a definite appeal in those markets, because in those markets, the Internet penetration is still low.

"A lot of the markets still have less than 10 per cent of Internet penetration... whereas mobile penetration is a lot higher - somewhere in the range of 40 to 50 per cent. So it could happen that the first time someone is accessing the Internet could be on his mobile."

Mobile Internet users worldwide are estimated by Juniper Research to hit 1.7 billion by 2013 - a sharp jump from 577 million currently.

Lai Kok Fung, CEO, BuzzCity, said: "The user that uses the mobile a lot to surf the Internet is typically the middle or lower class or even people that have no previous experience on the Internet. And they use the phone a lot as an entertainment device."

This will help to spur a jump in mobile user-generated content. Some popular websites - including Facebook and Friendster - have started launching their mobile versions.

According to Singapore's BuzzCity, which provides social networking tools for mobile users, it saw more than 1.2 billion page views in Indonesia alone in the second quarter for its mobile social networking service MyGamma.

Mr Lai said: "We've seen that... in (just) six months, Indonesian traffic for us has increased from almost nothing... today we're serving some 20 million page views a day.

"So it's definitely a growth trend - we have seen growth in Indonesia, Thailand... we've begun to see that in Philippines and in a lesser extent in Vietnam as well.

"In Malaysia and in Singapore... (they were) actually an early adopter, but unfortunately the carriers in this region have been slow to react to the pricing package and they still price it for the Blackberry and the iPhone crowd."

Mr Lai said: "That means the advertising is shown 20 million times a day for Indonesian users, because one of the carriers in Indonesia, namely Indosat, has provided (a) very innovative pricing package for their people to surf.

"So any package that you want to offer has to take that into consideration. You're not targeting the professionals, you're targeting the middle-lower class who have a different usage pattern."

Some analysts said the mobile phone can even be the dominant Internet platform of the future. The trend will be driven by the affordability of phones and competitive pricing packages from telecommunications providers.
- CNA/ms

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