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No, really! Who surfs the internet on their mobiles?

By **KF Lai**

Most brands don't have mobile sites because they still see the mobile user as an unknown factor, but a recent poll of 3,000 users could offer some insight.

The mobile internet is reputedly growing, despite economic downturns and financial upheavals. In order to take advantage of this medium, brands and marketers need to get better visibility of who the mobile internet user is. So what is the view beyond SMS and wallpaper downloads?

We recently polled 3,000 surfers from the two thousand publishers on our mobile advertising network. Here are top 10 things you should know about the mobile internet user.

1. For now at least, on a global scale, users are predominantly men (69 percent). But various regional and national trends show an increase in females surfing. Southeast Asian countries average 40 percent female presence with Brunei, Philippines and Thailand recording higher than average female surfers.
2. 60 percent have studied at a formal tertiary institution, be it a trade school or university.
3. 66 percent are between the ages of 20 and 30. Most are in their lower twenties.
4. Blue-collar and service industry workers are a core part of the mobile internet community. This is an untapped sector with a disposable income spent on electronic and virtual goods.
5. Mobile devices are their primary access to the internet as many can't get their hands on a PC and others habitually don't use a computer (because their jobs don't require them to).
6. Users go online to communicate with others, proving that (mobile) phones are still tools that help people network. Users connect through chat, blog and various mobile services on and off the operator portals.
7. Contrary to often held beliefs, many (70 percent) are at home when they go online. Half of all users go online more than five times a day, usually after dinner.
8. Usage is spread throughout the day, but the most popular time to surf starts in the early evenings and continues past midnight.
9. Mobile users are digital savvy and are well in tune with the digital lifestyle. Top on their shopping list for 2009 are video game consoles and computer-peripherals.
10. While commercial transactions are not the primary reason for going online, consumers want to transact with their mobiles. Banking services like money transfers and remittances are much sought-after services.

Overall, mobile usage has gone beyond voice and text messaging. For many who can't or won't use a computer, the mobile phone has also become a handy tool for accessing the internet. This in turn, has evolved beyond 'traditional' downloads and extended the way people use their phones. There is, of course, a clear need for brands and marketers to work in this space, but the challenge lies in convincing marketers who are unlikely to be the typical mobile internet user.

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