

The Discovery channels

Users will vote with their feet if they can't find the content they want on the fly.
Peggy Anne Salz looks beyond mobile search...

A SLEW of usability studies published recently share the same message: the vast majority of mobile content is positioned too far from the homepage, rendering it invisible to users.

Many operators have embraced mobile search as a solution, but this is a 'pull' approach built on the premise that users know what they want and are prepared to go look for it.

That's quite an assumption when it comes to accessing fast-moving content such as entertainment, or apps and services buried deep in the device core.

However, a paradigm of content 'push', based on a deep understanding of the individual's purchases, passions and past click-behaviour, is beginning to gain traction. A new breed of companies have sharpened their focus on helping users find what they want on

Typing 'ma' for example, might bring up a mapping application, a Madonna ringtone, contact information for 'Mark', or any number of other content or device features beginning with those letters.

Eric Collins, Tegic's VP of sales, says off-device content could include operator portal offers, favourite WAP pages or searches and third-party services: "Users don't have to know where content and services are kept physically in order to access them – this simplicity will drive more revenues as users make mobile content and services part of their daily routine."

This is already the case with Virgin Mobile in the UK, an operator that that recently ran a six-month trial with Qix (pronounced 'quicks'), a content discovery engine that works along a similar principle to the Tegic solution. After implementing the

keywords to deliver relevant and contextual ads."

Encouraging users to explore the content and services at their fingertips requires a well-developed approach to content discovery. Once the mobile industry has succeeded here, there will be no limit to the ways subscribers use their mobile devices to access entertainment and other content applications. And with the ability to target subscriber segments, track behaviour and save preferences, a whole array of revenue opportunities will open up for mobile operators and content providers.

● Peggy Anne Salz runs www.msearchgroove.com, a news and analysis site tracking mobile search, content discovery, personalisation, recommendation and targeted mobile advertising.



“A new breed of companies focus on helping users find what they want - without making them look for it.”

handsets as well as the mobile web – without making them look for it.

As Mobile Search & Content Discovery, a report released by Informa Telecoms & Media, is keen to point out: "If mobile operators and service providers want to sell more content, then they are going to have to remove the pain from the content discovery process and provide users with precisely what they want – perhaps even before they know they need it."

One such company is AOL-owned Tegic, best known for its T9 Text Input product, used in about 800 handsets. The company claims its new T9 Discovery Tool allows users to access apps and services – on the handset or on the mobile web – with only a few key presses.

software tool – developed by Zi Corp – Virgin Mobile reported a 33 per cent increase in ARPU.

Zi has since added context to the mix, an approach it says will allow it to deliver the right content to the right users. In line with this strategy the company has extended its discovery engine with QixLinks and QixLinks Ads.

"If a user types in weather, for example, Qix is pre-configured to offer links to sites, such as Sky Weather, and we also check that those sites will work on that operator's network," says Bill Templeton, Zi Corp's business development director. "In a mobile advertising scenario, Qix would take the cue from users'

