MOBILE.NXT

IMAGINING THE FUTURE...

SPECIAL
SUPPLEMENT

Operator, handset marketer and content players need to get their act together for data consumption to explode.

CONTENTS

VOICE TO DATA: A JOURNEY HAS BEGUN

The service providers need to generate more revenue per user for which providing efficient data services is the only way out.

BY SANDEEP BUDKI

Way back in 1995, when mobile technology first came to India, the first priority of Indian telcos was to make voice services available in every nook and corner of the country; data services were last on their list. But things have changed since then and telcos have now started focusing on data services not only to increase revenue but also to meet consumers' data needs.

Smartphones are increasingly being used for accessing emails, sending multimedia messages and for interacting on social networks. People are using music services either by downloading music files or by streaming music over mobile broadband.

India had sometime back surpassed Japan to become the world's third largest internet user after China and the United States, and its users are significantly younger than those of other emerging economies, global digital measurement and analytics firm ComScore recently said in a report.

WHAT LED TO THIS SITUATION?

With time, the emphasis on basic phones reduced since they just concentrated on voice and SMS services, and newer feature rich phones with data connectivity options arrived.

Many feature rich phones now come integrated with a browser, Facebook and other messaging apps which further drive the need for more data consumption. The arrival of smartphones with bigger screens means better computing capability for users, who can also interact with the phones better, thus extracting more information from the same phone and interacting with friends more.

Service providers, on the other hand, need to generate more revenue per user, for which providing more and efficient data services is the only way out.

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If we look at Aircel, it promised customers internet through the mobile in 2008 and at that time it was promoting mobile internet with music or ring back tones, cheap calling rates and internet usage on the go. Unlike other mobile companies it was concentrating on data rather than voice services.

MTS, another telecom operator, is also eyeing growth through mobile data services as it believes the technology it was using offers great potential for mobile broadband access.

CURRENT SCENARIO

A whopping 87 per cent of data users in India access the internet through mobile phones and tablets, according to a recent report of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). As per the report, there are 164.81 million users in India who have internet access. Of them 143.20 million subscribers access the internet through wireless phones, i.e. mobile phones and tablets.

For mobile apps, consumers can access app stores from telcos, handset companies and independent players, and if they wish to use internet on a mobile they can choose from sachet plans starting from Rs 5 to minimum monthly rental plans of Rs 99.

Also, with the introduction of 3G services, data consumption is on a growth path with faster access and an improved user experience letting people access live music, video streaming services, video calling, and HD gaming on their handsets. However, there is a long way to go before we get uniform 3G connectivity across the country.

Recently, to make 3G mobile internet more attractive for its subscribers Reliance Communications has announced a steep tariff cut in its 3G data prices, bringing it to the level of 2G.

Meanwhile, in the handset space, manufacturers are now focusing on devices with larger screens. As per research conducted by The Mobile Indian, the average screen size of handsets people searched online has increased from 2.9 inches in January 2012 to 4.5 inches in July this year.

This rise of phablets or smartphones with 5 inch and bigger screens can be primarily attributed to Indian handset marketers who sell phones with large screens for as low as Rs 6,400.

Also, off late almost all the Indian handset players like Micromax, Karbonn and Xolo have recently launched smartphones with specifications similar to phones of MNC players–with 4 inch or larger screens, quad core processors and HD displays.

As far as app ecosystem is concerned, India is young and evolving. There is a huge market for apps throughout the country, but a lot has to be done especially in terms of localisation of content to make it more appealing to the masses.

FUTURE

I am sure that with the availability of affordable devices, which offer good user experience, and improvements in 3G services; and the arrival of 4G, data services will become much more main stream and can be offered in areas where people have never experienced an internet connection.

It is expected that in the coming years, convergence of all sorts of services like television, VoIP, home automation and data storage on mobile phones will take off but for that all the stake holders of the mobile ecosystem will need to have a collective mobile strategy in place. ■

> There is a huge market for apps in India, but a lot has to be done in terms of localisation of content.

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CONTRIBUTORY ARTICLE

THE FUTURE OF APPLICATION ECOSYSTEM

Mobile devices are replacing tablets and PCs in terms of utility and function, which has proved a stimuli for app development.

BY ANNIE MATHEW

DIRECTOR, ALLIANCES AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT, BLACKBERRY

Mobile applications have come a long way from being merely pre-installed tools on mobile phones. Now they provide the user with a range and variety of personalised tools. Most smartphones today have the capacity to run a variety of applications, some of which even provide services over the cloud. Most users are now defining the purchase of their smartphones according to the range of applications on offer and their utility requirements. With smartphone penetration in India crossing a little over 67 million, application developers now have an open market ahead of them.

Mobile phone apps are now catering to the exact requirements of customers, rather than only being appealing to buyers. This has paved new opportunities for several startups who are solely focused on tailor making applications for resolving specific business problems. Increasingly, enterprise applications, collaboration tools and virtualisation programs are also being developed to work across cloud platforms offered by third party vendors.

With 51 million urban smartphone users, smartphone sales are driven mostly by teenagers, hence there is an open market for entertainment applications as well. Young people usually download music, games, social networking and instant messaging apps. The future sees developers integrating all three in a medium that allows users to multiplay games on their mobile devices while chatting with each other in parallel and sharing music through the same applications. Increasingly, teens are also adopting a significant number of educational and utility applications that are scaled down versions of enterprise apps. For example, several small cloud services, where teens are most commonly known to share files and photos from their mobile devices,

are provided for free.

Increasingly, newer trends like augmented reality (AR) are finding their place among application developers. Augmented reality is being used in areas such as news broadcast and updates to travel and exploration. An interesting area where AR can be explored is in identity tracking. Applications can integrate with facial recognition features when scanned with the smartphone's camera to link to the individuals' social networking sites . AR Kick, an application recently developed on BlackBerry, has been receiving accolades globally for being able to integrate AR to find hotspots near the user.

Several web based applications are now being transposed to mobile platforms to provide users with a sense of mobility. Mobile devices are replacing tablets and PCs in terms of utility and function, and a lot of business decisions are being made over these mobile devices. This proves especially useful for startups, who now have the advantages of integrating several essential applications to the smartphones, hence providing an experience of professionalism and maturity.

This has opened some bright prospects for the application developer ecosystem as well. With a large number of startups finding their roots in India, application developers are heavily focused on rehabilitating large and complex business software into simple formats with interactive UI, to provide startups the same experiences of large enterprises. The developer ecosystem is also rapidly adopting methodologies influenced by design thinking, working their way back and emphasising user experience rather than functionality alone. With devices opening themselves out to application development across tools like Java and HTML, several youngsters are now developing some very promising applications that are finding their way into the market. In Kochi, BlackBerry has partnered with Startup Village to open Rubus Labs, a developer ecosystem where applications are customised and developed as per the needs of the user. Rubus Labs has opened new avenues for designers who have an application idea, and the company provides the necessary tools and support to execute the app, thus fostering a new breed of application developers in India.

Overall, the future of application development, especially in India, looks optimistic with the possibility of expanding its foothold into territories where mobile phone and applications can work in sync to provide the perfect, simplest solutions, fast. ■

With 51 million urban smartphone users, smartphone sales are driven mostly by teenagers, hence there is an open market for entertainment applications.

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FUTURE OF MOBILE TV

In a country like India where each region has a completely different entertainment ecosystem, the potential that online mobile TV technology has for localisation and personalisation is immense.

BY SHABIR MOMIN

MD & CTO-ZENGATV

Five minutes on a street in India and you will be convinced that you are in the most connected community in the world. Cutting across socio-economic classifications, there is a feature common to everyone – a mobile phone! This technology that most of us have seen evolve, has transformed the nation from one where a telephone was the symbol of dystopian bureaucracy – with trunk calls, rotary dials, and seven-year waiting periods for a new connection– to one where a mobile phone has become a way of life. I manage doing everything from managing my bank accounts to paying bills to booking tickets to following my fitness regime on my mobile phone!

India happens to be the third largest household television market. The country also has the second largest cell phone user base in the world. Mobile television would seem like the natural progression.

Mobile entertainment forms the biggest chunk of the MVAS (mobile value added services) pie. In a country like India where each region has a completely different entertainment ecosystem, the potential that online mobile TV technology has for localisation and personalisation is immense.

New formats like streaming of live events and shows on mobiles have captured the hearts of millions of Indians. India now has over 500 million video views a month on mobile devices, the average duration of clips viewed being 3-7 minutes.

The growth in mobile-video viewing has been triggered by a rapid adoption of smartphones with larger screens as well as faster internet connectivity, both through mobile operators and WiFi networks. This has resulted in people using phones to catch up on television programs, especially news, movies, interesting clippings etc, while they travel using public transport or when the household television and computer is occupied.

Urban India is choosing not to be

restricted by timings and location to watch television. With mobile screens becoming larger and the availability of their favourite shows online, watching TV when it is convenient to them is gaining favour with audiences. It's an interesting phase for consumers in India with a rapidly growing number of smartphones and tablets. As more and more consumers watch TV content on their personal devices, brands are presented with a huge opportunity to connect with consumers using the immersive full-screen mobile user experience.

While mobile's influence on traditional television has been felt for some time, convergence of the two platforms started stepping into high-gear this year. With a surge in digital viewing of TV programming and in the kinds of content available for such consumption, mobile is increasingly influencing when and where consumers watch their favourite programs. At the same time, mobile's role in how viewers engage with their traditional TV sets is also growing, as evidenced by the launch of Google's Chromecast, and the new offerings from Twitter for TV advertisers in the USA.

Below are six predictions which describe both the changes in how viewers will watch content and also how different players in the media ecosystem will engage the customer:

1. Mobile will dominate all-increasing viewership and control of TV
2. Tablets and smartphones will increase IQ
3. Second screen interactivity and commerce will blossom
4. User interface and personalisation will become critical
5. Media brands will rise like titans

6. A new breed of content creators will challenge traditional creators

With more and more consumers watching TV content on their personal devices, brands are presented with a huge opportunity to connect with consumers using a full-screen immersive mobile user experience. The future of TV is closely intertwined with the future of mobile. Once brands can figure out how to sync messaging across the TV and mobile experiences, that's when things will start to get interesting.

Budgets are shifting to mobile, and today, that shift is coming from online spending. But it makes sense that as mobile becomes a more integrated part of the TV viewing experience; TV revenue will start shifting as well. ■

> **Urban India is choosing not to be restricted by timings and location to watch television.**

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A SEED ABOUT TO SPROUT

Previously, the Indian telecom sector was ruled by foreign direct investments. A few international brands used to have monopoly over the Indian market. Now there is a big upsurge in the market, brought in by indigenous companies.

BY MOHAMMAD GYASUDDIN

MD, HITECH CELLPHONE

People need everything in their cellular phones, right from stylish design, good camera resolution, easy to operate interfaces, good battery backup, etc.

Mobile phone size also matters a lot. High-end tabs, expensive earphones with woofer sound capacity are what everyone looks to own. Phones with faster internet connectivity, better communication networks and maximum in-built features will be developed to increase the customer base of this industry.

Students are switching to hardware and networking as a subject in their educational courses. This can open an avenue towards developing the latest mobile phone network technologies. The mobile industry also requires great mobile software programmers so that their products can rank high amongst end users.

The government has to very careful in the spectrum allocation policies when it comes to implementation of mobile technologies like 2G, 3G, etc. These mobile technologies need to be implemented in such a way that they do not fall prey to financial irregularities. ■

CO-OPERATION FOR A MOBILE TOMORROW

Mobile video publishers, content providers and mobile carrier networks need to consider each other's constraints, and work together to ensurea great consumer experience.

BY NIKHIL NAIK

DIRECTOR, GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION AND CONTENT, VUCLIP

In the past, mobile stakeholders have sought to preserve their own interests, but this will not work in the long run. As apps and mobile destinations proliferate, carriers are seeing shrinking margins, content owners are struggling with monetization, and mobile advertisers are grappling with lack of standardization.

Industry experts estimate that almost 60 million Indians watch content on mobile devices. In a country like India, mobile is the first and only screen for millions of people. For brands, this represents an unprecedented opportunity to reach this previously untapped audience in a targeted manner. This means content owners, wireless carriers, agencies and brands must team up to ensure everyone in the ecosystem is able to flourish.

Consumers are looking for the most optimal video experience, for example. This translates to different things for different people. For the user on a high-end smart device on a 4G network, it may mean HD video quality without any buffering. For a user on a feature phone with a constantly varying Edge network, it means experiencing the best video quality that the feature phone can accept without any buffering. Trying to jam HD quality video over a network or to a device that cannot sustain it produces a buffered experience for the consumer and puts an unnecessary burden on the operator network. Similarly, providing low quality video experience on a highly capable device-network combination leads to poor consumer experience,

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which reflects poorly on the carrier network.

This suggests that mobile video publishers, content providers and mobile carrier networks need to consider each other's constraints and work together to ensure a great consumer experience. Here are a few recommendations that will move the ecosystem to this model:

1. It is important to provide consumers with the most personalized content that is optimized for the mobile device and for the demographic. An example of this in many emerging markets is the consumption levels of 2-4 minute clips rather than full TV serials, or the amount of regional content that gets consumed over global content.

2. Content providers must be able to find successful ways to monetize their content. This is possible through two options. 1) Free, ad-supported models where CPMs will be high if the content is appealing to consumers and brands. In this ad supported model, it is critical that mobile and content publishers, and brands work closely together to ensure rich media ad units are impactful while not being obtrusive. 2) Freemium model where consumers are given a lot of free content, thereby increasing the acquisition at the top of the funnel, and then a small percentage of them pay for truly premium content. In today's world, piracy and YouTube have led consumers to expect free content and that is a reality that cannot be changed anytime soon. But what if consumers had access to relevant, premium content through an accessible, rich experience on a specific device at an affordable price? According to a recent study by QuickPlay Media, 50 per cent of viewers surveyed in the US, UK and Canada are willing to pay for premium mobile video content. Management consulting firm McKinsey found that demographics also play a role, with the youth population being 1.5 to 2.3 times more likely to purchase premium content subscriptions and apps than older consumers.

3. Mobile users in many markets will not stream mobile content because they pay for data by bytes consumed. Even for consumers who are used to capped data plans, video has the tendency to consume large amounts of data, causing the consumer to hit their cap very soon. For example, watching about 200 minutes of video on a Samsung Galaxy S4 on a 3G network at HD can consume the entire 2 GB data plan limit. The amount of data consumed and their pricing models are generally unclear; the subscriber often watches videos across different device-network combinations at an unknown cost. This is the reason behind relatively low data penetration rates in markets where capped data plans are the only reality. This can only be solved if carriers work with content providers to create alternatives that combat data abuse and yet bring video to the masses. For example, the Airtel ₹1 Video Store in India is a ground-breaking concept. Any video costs the user 2 cents (₹1) and includes content and data costs. This makes the value proposition more transparent and provides a safe environment for the consumer, thereby driving mass consumption of data.

The mobile ecosystem is capable of developing creative solutions that benefit every party; if we work together and keep consumer experience in mind. ■

> **In a country like India, mobile is the first and only screen for millions of people. Thus content owners, wireless carriers, agencies and brands must team up to ensure everyone in the ecosystem is able to flourish.**

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NAVIGATING TO THE FUTURE

The next generation of GPS navigation is surely going to be a lot more interactive and essentially connected--and herein lie possibilities of great innovation in hardware and software.

BY RAKESH VERMA

MANAGING DIRECTOR,
MAPMYINDIA

GPS navigation, a technology that was meant for military purposes, has made strong inroads into the civilian landscape. This technology has come a long way from being just track and trace tech in cool gadgets, and applications in the hands of the youth. With improvement in technology and accurate digital mapping, GPS navigation has been democratized as never before. It has been empowering the consumer across multiple platforms. We see it in PNDs (personal navigation devices), smartphones, in-car entertainment systems, laptops, tablets, and the list goes on.

Organizations and institutions ranging from government to private, and from manufacturing to services, all are using GPS navigation for productivity and security. Such is the reach of this technology that almost every new smartphone launched has to have GPS navigation. This has become a given as the consumer expects this feature to be standard across all the smart devices she aspires to own. This is good news for companies like MapmyIndia as the smartphone segment in India is growing the fastest.

But what is the future for this technology? We have updated maps, we have city views in 3D, and the last mile has been connected with house and street level data—all of India has been mapped and put in a device of the consumer's choice. Today, with a PND or smart device, or even with a computer printout of digital maps, you can find directions between any two points in India. It has all been done and the maps are regularly updated. Again, what does the future augur for GPS navigation?

The next generation of GPS navigation is surely going to be a lot more interactive and essentially connected.

THE FUTURE

GPS navigation technology, though constantly evolving, has reached a high level of standardization. Some innovation will come from hardware,

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but even this will be driven by digital maps. Their rendition and layering with value added services will be the new wave of evolution in this field.

CONNECTED NAVIGATION

A new generation of devices like CarPads, tablets etc. are fast becoming popular. People are looking at devices that don't just tell them the way but much more. With connected devices comes real time traffic information, social media interfaces and other features that aid productivity on the go. We are likely to see more and more car entertainment systems coming pre loaded with GPS navigation and internet access. With the development of support infrastructure it will be possible to know changes in traffic regulations, for example about Kolkata's one way routing for various roads during morning and evening, or about temporary barricading or blockages that are all updated on your device in real time.

SOCIAL NAVIGATION

Recently we launched an application called Explore, which allows users to login with Facebook, pin places (which is marking a place as 'been here'), add photos, write reviews, follow other users and subscribe to places. Any such activity is posted on Facebook right away. Social navigation is the way ahead. Friends can be reached, trips can be planned, routes charted out and rendezvous points agreed upon, all while interacting with friends on social media—not to mention the hotel bookings (with best rates flashing), transport (flight, train, bus/car or charter), and weather forecasts all taken care of. This will also open up new business opportunities for related industries like tours and travels, aviation, hospitality etc.

WEARABLE DEVICES

Wearable is the way to go for devices and these will or are already changing the way we navigate. Smart watches and similar accessories that make gadgets wearable are in increasing demand. But that's not the end of it. We can see some real innovation here like car windscreens that double up as navigation screens, and smart helmets that offer visual and voice guided navigation. All these technologies are in use for military purposes, but will not remain limited to that. Google Glass is a definite step towards what the future might look like.

3D NOW BUT HOLOGRAPHIC (6D) NAVIGATION IN FUTURE

This is something to lookout for. It might be the ultimate in navigation. The real holographic mapping of a city—this, ladies and gentlemen, is the way to go.. A real walk/drive through any place in the world will require a milieu in which art, science and technologies intermingle to deliver this wondrous augmentation of reality, which is real. Instead of your device screen showing 3D images, a real hologram pops out and as you move forward so does the hologram. This will have all the details, real buildings, monuments, landmarks, road signs etc. all created to scale. Both indoor and outdoor navigation have to be seamlessly merged to deliver this.

And yes, the prices of smart devices and PNDs are falling, and no communication package is complete without a GPS navigation element in it. Hence, I see phenomenal growth in the uptake of GPS navigation in India. ■

> **Wearable is the way to go for devices and these will or are already changing the way we navigate.**

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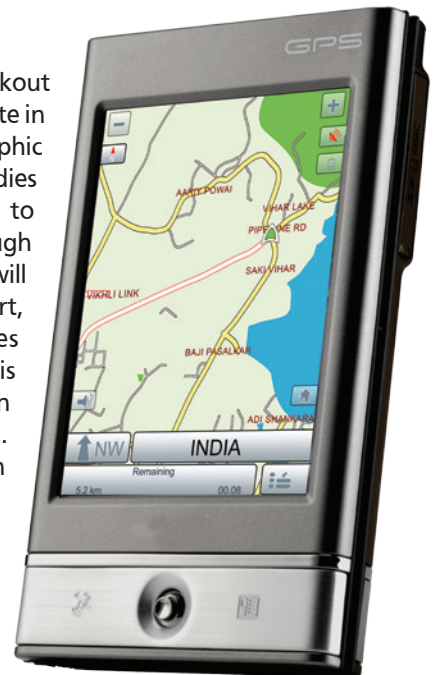
HARDWARE OR SOFTWARE? REMEMBER: IT'S BOTH

As people adopt more devices into their lifestyles, like smartphones, tablets, phablets, notebooks, smart TVs, glasses and watches, there is a greater need for software to create a seamless experience across a variety of hardware.

BY TROY MALONE

GENERAL MANAGER – ASIA PACIFIC, EVERNOTE CORPORATION

Mobile technology has changed our lives. It's impact is for the most part a positive one, with both individuals and businesses reaping huge benefits. The biggest testament to this is the fact that anyone can communicate with anyone, anywhere, 24/7. I can send instant messages to my colleagues in India, as easily as I can chat with my family over long distances from anywhere in the world using VoIP services.

IT'S AN EXTREMELY DYNAMIC, EXCITING SPACE

The mobile revolution is quickly spreading in India, especially considering the vibrant mobile industry here. Yet, it's possible that we're only seeing the cusp of what mobile technology can do here.

There are about 120 million people online in India today—just 10 per cent of its population. By 2015, however, there will be more than 330 million of them, making the country second only to China in the number of citizens using the internet.

Mobile lies at the heart of this exponential growth, with 9 per cent of all internet page views in India coming from mobile devices. This number is set to explode. With mobile devices becoming increasingly more affordable and accessible, it's no wonder that smartphone user numbers have swelled from practically zero to 36 million in little over 4 years, and will continue to do so for years to come.

INDIA RIPE FOR INVESTMENT

The market indicators are very positive, making India ripe for investment in terms of setting up shop, gaining more

market reach, or funding startups. That's the reason why most companies, across industries, are investing in India for the long term.

It is clear that the mobile industry bears many game-changing innovations for a market like India. The power of mobile devices mean content consumption can happen totally within the mobile device environment, irreversibly changing the way businesses reach customers. Locally, there are firms emerging that recognise this, and they are developing solutions that have the potential to become internationally relevant. I am sure that as the mobility phenomenon penetrates deeper into the Indian market, it will impact the country's GDP in a more marked way.

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

The best hardware without the best software – and vice versa – is meaningless. The race will go to innovations that seamlessly integrate the best technologies from both to create impeccably designed user experiences. This becomes more important as people adopt devices into their lifestyles. There is a greater need for software to create a seamless experience across a variety of hardware.

We at Evernote believe that this is the next great leap in the relationship between humanity and machines. If these myriad devices, in their variety of shapes and forms, are to improve the user's quality of life, they must work seamlessly and consistently with software.

Companies that operate conscious of this will be best poised to deliver value to customers in the innovation revolution to come. We are working hard to be part of that future, particularly here in India, where mobile technologies are defining the growth trajectory of the nation. ■

The mobile revolution is quickly spreading in India, especially considering the vibrant mobile industry here.

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WHY ACCESSORIES ARE IMPORTANT?

2014 will be the year of wearable tech, or what the industry would call the wearable device ecosystem (WDE).

BY PANKAJ MIRCHANDANI

MANAGING PARTNER, RCA

With 2014 round the corner I often ask myself this question: how many screens will I be facing today? They seem to be omnipresent - my phone, laptop, tablet, home TV screen, a screen in the car panel and finally the one on my wrist? Gadgets have become an inseparable part of my life.

These gadgets, to be useful to the individual user, must have the necessary tools.

There are two ways that gadgets get accessorized:

- By the customer post purchase
- By the manufacturer (bundled/built in or optional at the point of purchase)

Until now most of the accessorisation was done at the consumer level. The industry view was that their products are unique and thus their USP will carry them through in the market, but with more and more brands in the same market, wooing the same consumers with similar looking tablets and smartphones, scope for differentiation is fast diminishing. And price points have been done to death.

SO HOW DO THEY DIFFERENTIATE?

Accessorization! We will see more and more products bundled with accessories like cases, headphones, bags, or built into the product to enhance their functionality. Many handset manufacturers have come in focus in this category with their own lineup of lifestyle accessories, with Samsung, Nokia and BlackBerry leading the way. Now even home grown boys like Micromax and Karbonn are following suit. With the launch of Apple's new iOS7 many third party brands were caught unawares of the change in Apple firmware - Apple has ensured accessory manufacturers fall in line and join the MFi program

> We will see more and more products bundled with accessories like cases, headphones, bags, or built into the product to enhance their functionality.

(read Made for iPad/iPad/iPhone). So watch out for more manufacturer-built, regulated or licensed accessories.

WEARABLE TECH

I reckon 2014 will be the year of Wearable Tech, or what the industry would call wearable device ecosystem (WDE). Wrist bands like Fuelband, UP & Flex have already led the first phase of the personal tracker market with many me-too brands jumping in. In phase two we saw smartwatches from Qualcomm, Motorola, Sony and, most recently, Samsung. Whether these devices will replace or complement your smart device depends on their wearability/ usability or the individual urge to own the latest gadget in the market. And then there is Google Glass, which has sent ripples across the gadget world.

EVEN APP DEVELOPERS SAY SO

In a conference I attended in Hong Kong last month it was shared that 27 per cent of app developers worldwide are focused on apps for the WDE. Considering we are looking at 7 million smartwatches to be sold in 2014, that is a huge number of apps on your wrist.

PROTECTION IS A PRIMARY CONCERN

Since that (very expensive) smartphone or tablet is with you all the time, you are worried about its safety, wear and tear. Enter cases and screen protectors. Some just cover phones, some offer protection, and some make them damage proof. We are seeing cases that withstand hammer charges, water immersion, free-falls and who knows—a thermo nuclear implosion! The winner is a case that protects and looks good.

THE QUEER CASE OF POWER

For our smart-devices to be functional all the time, they need power. Battery life has improved but so have demands. Enter higher capacity battery banks, wireless chargers (based on Qi inductive system), motion chargers (kinetic recharge while walking or running), high speed chargers (charge your device in half the time), and eco friendly chargers (solar powered, finger powered). These will surely hit the market in the near future.

TECHNOLOGY

Another driver of the accessories segment is technology. Take the case of 4G LTE, where Korea and Japan already lead the pack. Near field communication (NFC) will be embedded in nearly all smart devices, including your home entertainment system. This has made accessories even smarter. For example, many brands have already incorporated NFC in portable Bluetooth speakers, as has been the trend with DSLR camera lenses, which in themselves command iconic status. Who knows in case of smartphone accessories we might soon see some icons of our own.

In the near future I don't see robust growth only in smart device accessories, but also accessorization driving innovation–differentiation and growth in the smart devices industry. ■

Another driver of the accessories segment is technology, like 4G and NFC.

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POOR AFTER-SALES SERVICE: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

In the July-Sept 2013, 81300 consumers complained on the Akosha platform. Of these telecom formed the bulk (27%) with the mobile phones sector not far behind (15.5%).

BY ANKUR SINGLA

FOUNDER AND CEO, AKOSHA

A s the CEO of Akosha, a company which helps brands resolve online consumer complaints, I have had the "pleasure" of reading and understanding complaints against almost all the large brands across different sectors.

The famous Indian neuroscientist V S Ramachandran believes that to really understand functioning of a human brain, you need to study a damaged brain – it reveals far more about how things really work than a fully functioning brain. I think consumers' complaints offer a similar glimpse into companies (away from the balance sheets and the revenue numbers).

First, let's look at the data. In the July-Sept 2013, 81300 consumers complained on the Akosha platform. Of these telecom formed the bulk (27%) with the mobile phones sector not far behind

(15.5%), i.e. roughly 12700 customers.

We dug into this small sample of everyday consumer experience, and found that an astonishing 82% of the customers had already sought the resolution from the respective brand twice. For some Indian mobile phone brands, the average time the phone had already spent at the service center was 21 days! For a device bought with so much love and one with which the customer self-identifies, 3 weeks is a long time indeed.

Out of these customers, Delhi-NCR has the highest share and this is true across other sectors as well - seems like Dilli-wallas love to complain.

As would be expected, complaints have a strong correlation with scale - Micromax, Samsung and Nokia account for 61.5% of the total online complaints. However, complaints seem to be growing

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Brands can create customer loyalty by improving customer experience at the service centers.

faster than the sector – in the July-Sept 2013 quarter, complaints against

For particular brands, one can make out a clear pattern in the complaints. For example, in the Micromax Canvas range, 54% of the complaints were against Canvas HD A116 and most of the complaints were regarding touchscreen and microphones issues. For Samsung premium mobile phones range, 78% of the complaints were against Galaxy S4 and most of them were regarding overheating and battery charging. In the Samsung basic smartphone category, 63% of the complaints were against Galaxy Duos and most them were about automatic shutdown and battery life. For Nokia Lumia

range, 47% of the complaints were against Lumia 720 and most of them were regarding microphone and speakers. Almost all the customers across brands suffered from bad experience at the customer service center.

There is hope though – apart from product changes (which have a trajectory of their own given the fast release cycles) – brands can clearly create customer loyalty by improving customer experience at the service centers.

Here are the things that customers want their mobile brands to do:

- Make a phone with decent battery life and responsive touchscreen
- Decrease the time that their phone has to spend at the customer service (availability of spare parts was a recurring theme)
- If a problem occurs multiple times, replace the phone with a new one
- Some states are clearly begging for more service centers (our data shows a skew for different brands in different states)
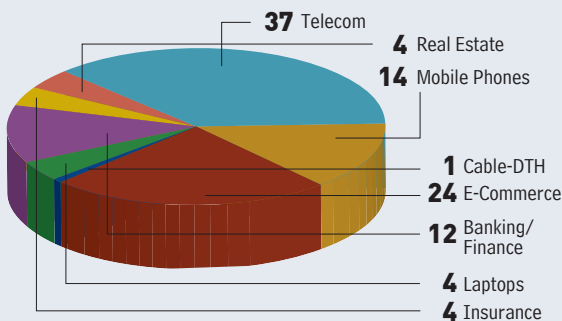
While I'm sure that none of the above suggestions are shockingly new, they would be useful to set the agenda for 2014. Because it is the unhappy customer who teaches us the most.

Ankur Singla is the founder and CEO of Akosha, a platform which helps brands win back unhappy customers and benchmark their customer service with peers. ■

Split of online complaints among top 8 industries

All figures in percenage

- **37** Telecom
- **4** Real Estate
- **14** Mobile Phones
- **1** Cable-DTH
- **24** E-Commerce
- **12** Banking/Finance
- **4** Laptops
- **4** Insurance

THE MOBILE INDIAN
HELPS YOU CHOOSE

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