Networking: Gamers get satisfaction

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Special agent Ethan Hunt -- a.k.a. Tom Cruise -- suddenly appears on your mobile phone's color screen. You're being recruited to be a non-official cover intelligence asset. As Hollywood prepares to premiere the third installment in the "Mission: Impossible" film franchise, Paramount Pictures, and producers Cruise and Paula Wagner, are working with a mobile-gaming company to bring the action right to your "third screen." Is it any wonder, experts are telling United Press International's Networking column, that, with interactive games like this, consumers are today very satisfied with the level of performance of their mobile networks?

A new survey, released last week by London-based I-play, the mobile entertainment company, demonstrates that 79 percent of mobile gamers were either very satisfied or satisfied with the mobile games they played over wireless carriers' networks. As the market has come under close scrutiny by investors on Wall Street, for its investment potential, the survey shows that mobile game networks are not for the extreme geek fringe anymore, but are really appealing to consumers.

"The mobile games industry is now showing its true potential through building a loyal base of users responding to a game experience with very high-quality standards," said David Gosen, chief executive officer of I-Play, a firm headquartered in London, and backed by venture capitalists, like Apax Partners and Argo Global Capital. "The new generation of casual mobile gamers is vital to helping fuel the industry's continued growth, as they share their overwhelmingly positive experiences with gamers and non-gamers alike."

To be sure, the customer satisfaction levels have been years in the making. The promise of gaming over mobile networks -- and playing multi-user games with friends, and new acquaintances, remotely, has been there for years. But the industry has had a hard time delivering on the ideal. The content wasn't quite exciting enough, initially, and the network coverage was often spotty. But with the advent of third generation networks, that is finally starting to change.

The survey showed that 63 percent of mobile game players said their experience with the network -- once plagued by problems like latency, which interfered with the game-playing experience -- was as expected, and 15 percent said it was even better than expected. The industry thinks that consumers are finally "endorsing" the idea of mobile game networks.

"Content directly targets the male youth market that is both media savvy and great consumers of wireless content," said Adrian McAloon, senior director of content and licensing at the mobile content developer, WiderThan, which works with SK Telecom in Korea, Cingular Wireless, Sprint Nextel, T-Mobile USA and Verizon Wireless in the U.S., as well as Bharti Airtel in India and Globe Telecom in the Philippines.

The demographic spans the ages of 12 to 34 and is attracted to the "networking" aspect of mobile content that is emerging today, one where users can create community applications, like user profiles, as well as access interest groups -- game fan clubs -- register for game delivery, online, and over the airwaves, and receive updates on their favorite games, while on the go.

This is taking mobile content way beyond the first generation of ring tones and wall paper, experts tell Networking. "Wireless is a crucial distribution tool," said Tony Touch, a music producer, and the founder of Touch Entertainment Inc.

Another feature of the network-enabled mobile phone culture that is coming soon is interactivity with other consumer electronics products. For example, Basel, Switzerland-based Secure Digital Container AG recently announced the debut of software for mobile phones, linked to music recognition service, Shazam. That means that if consumers are out and about, and hear a song they like, they can put their mobile phone up to the speakers, and identify the tune, for possible purchase, over the Internet or the mobile network, said Robert Blumenthal, senior vice president of Telus, an $8.1 billion wireless carrier based in Canada.

That's the kind of networking technology that, a decade ago, would have only been possible in spy movies like "Mission: Impossible."

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