

Wireless World: What women want

May 5 2006

Every year U.S. women spend \$5 billion on magazines, movies and other lifestyle "content." Now, marketing experts tell UPI's Wireless World, the mobile-phone industry is eyeing the women's market as a new niche, hoping to provide customized content, whether it is ringtones, personalized "wallpaper" or other features exclusively for female customers.

The number of women age 15 to 45 who download content for mobile phones is expected to reach 20 million.

"Our research shows a clear gap between what women want and need and what is being made available to them by traditional mobile content providers, both in terms of games and in the larger category of lifestyle applications," said Kristin Asleson McDonnell, chief executive officer of LimeLife, a mobile content publisher based in Menlo Park, Calif., in the heart of Silicon Valley.

According to focus-group research of female cell-phone users that LimeLife conducted with market research firm Just Ask a Woman, women use mobile phones differently at separate stages of their lives.

For example, the survey demonstrated that the mobile phone initially serves as a "private line" for girls 16-17 years old, then becomes an "always with me connected buddy" during college years. After college, the phone becomes a "command central" for moms and career-oriented women.

Surprisingly, the survey showed, mobile games are also very popular with women customers, coming in second only to ringtones as a desired download. The survey showed that 69 percent of women age 18 to 22 surveyed have already downloaded one or more ringtones. The use of ringtones as "caller ID" identifiers is also representative of the importance of customization and personalization in mobile content for younger women, the pollsters said.

This proprietary research is confirmed by that of other industry sources such as M:Metrics, which reports that while mobile gaming is gender-neutral in terms of game-play sessions, males generate the greater percentage of game downloads. But women are more interested in puzzle, word and strategy games than men, suggesting new venues of content development for the industry.

Research by the Boston-based IT research consultancy The Yankee Group indicates that 58 percent of mobile gamers are women, while only 42 percent are men.

The survey also demonstrated that 67 percent of those surveyed showed strong interest in wallpapers made from family photos they take.

In terms of new content development, the survey showed that women have a very strong interest in mobile applications that serve as reminders, such as alerts, and help them be more productive and efficient as they multitask throughout their typical day -- with 70 percent of those surveyed interested in reminders for things like doctor's appointments.

The global market for women's mobile software and m-commerce is projected to exceed \$6 billion by 2008, the LimeLife survey said. By 2009 mobile advertising and marketing spending alone may reach as high as \$760 million, according to research by eMarketer.

To the observer, the people pushing these trends are seeming combinations of the Dennis Leary "Fad King" character from the film "Wag the Dog" and Mel Gibson's advertising executive who could read women's minds from the movie "What Women Want."

"The wireless landscape continues to converge and morph," said a spokesman for TMNG Global, a strategic consulting firm for Fortune 500 firms based in Overland Park, Kan.

The key to landing and keeping new mobile customers is their college experience.

"Ninety percent of college students carry a mobile phone at all times," said Rodger Desai, president and chief executive officer of Rave Wireless, a technology developer for the mobile market based in New York City. "They carry mobile phones the way the rest of us carry our keys."

Sometimes, attracting these buyers takes more than content -- it requires technology innovation. The company developed a Global Positioning System for mobile phones that is aimed at college students and is currently being used by thousands of students at Montclair State University, New Jersey's second-largest public university. "Our students lead active lifestyles, so whether they're running to class or meeting a friend at night, they have peace of mind in knowing that, if they wish, someone can know where they are and where they are going, and help can be immediately on the way if needed," said Dr. Susan A. Cole, president of Montclair State University.

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