

July 27, 2005

**The Changing Venues of Search – Search Going Mobile**  
**By Jim Hedger, StepForth News Editor, [StepForth Placement Inc.](#)**

For the past few years I have been writing about the immense changes happening in search marketing. These changes are driven by a number of factors but the two that make the biggest difference are technological advances and user adoption. It has been a full decade since Netscape issued the IPO that sparked the tech-boom of the late 90's and the popularization / commercialization of the web. A decade does not seem like a long time in the evolution of culture but as many have already said, we live in accelerating times. Acceleration is based on efficiency and efficiency is enhanced by access to what one needs whenever one needs it.

The Internet has made information both personal and portable. Each user has their own version of the Internet; much like every person has their own version of the city or town they live in. Over the last decade, we the users have learned to weave a growing number of information tools, services and applications into the routines of our daily lives. The web not provides users with a constantly expanding library of data to draw from; it also presents users with their own personal spaces to store or share data with others. Understanding this concept is one of the keys to understanding the strategies of Google, Yahoo and MSN, along with the hundreds of large E-Commerce businesses including Amazon and EBay.

It is the users who dictate how technology develops. While their choices are obviously limited by the number of inventors and innovators, users choose which technologies survive and how those technologies will be used. Netscape withered when consumers replaced them with the free IE browser bundled in their Windows packages. Similarly, a substantial number of users chose Firefox as an alternative to IE. Today, users are migrating towards Internet capable handheld devices such as cell phones, Blackberrys and other PDAs.

The portability of a personalized information environment is what users want, hence the relationship between local search (cool maps included) and user-specific personalization of search results. Portability drives the laptop computer market, which in turn drives the WiFi market. The next natural step in the portability of one's personal information environment brought the web to mobile phones and hand-held devices. Search, being the only practical way to find one's way around the web is an increasingly important resource for mobile users.

According to a whitepaper, "Mobile Search and its Implications for Search Engine Marketing", which is going to be released next Monday by Lisa Wehr, CEO of OneUpMarketing, cell phone screens and other handheld mobiles are emerging as significant user environments. "When you merge the power of the Internet with the on-demand accessibility of a mobile device, you're creating a perfect storm for users and marketers alike," says Lisa.

She calls this environment "the third screen", listing television as the first and desktop/laptop computers as the second. While current mobile searchers tend to come from a younger demographic group, Lisa sees several social trends that will move many of us to adopt mobile devices, thus rapidly populating the third-screen environment.

These third-screens are very different from computer monitor as are the devices used to interact with them. The screen size is much smaller and bandwidth is an important factor. The majority of mobile devices don't have a mouse so scrolling down a page requires the use of buttons. Mobile devices such as cell phones tend to have limited keyboards and those with keyboards tend to have tiny keys. These factors play important roles in how the environment is used and how search marketers and site designers should work within it.

Lisa suggests marketers and designers should put more effort into making their documents third-screen friendly. For example, offering easy choice-options such as buttons along with text-links in a document recognizes the limitations of a mouse-less device. Another suggestion she makes is to research and target shorter keyword phrases as typing on a mobile device is often difficult.

Most importantly, Lisa's whitepaper draws a direct correlation between mobile search and local search. Comparing mobile search users' behaviour with Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Lisa notes that mobile users tend to search for personal-survival needs such as hotels (shelter), and restaurants (food) before confirming their personal-security needs such as news, email, travel (airline schedules, local mapping) and weather. After satisfying survival and security needs, mobile users tend towards establishing personalized information environments with favourite songs, shared-images and social networking as hallmarks of that space. When Maslow's basic needs are met in the mobile world, users tend to do exactly what one would expect; they go shopping.

When they do go shopping, they expect information on demand, just like they have been conditioned to expect by their search experiences at home or the office. Their behaviours when searching however will be different than those searching on a larger monitor. Mobile users have time constraints and are accessing the web at much lower connection speeds. Lisa's whitepaper goes on to describe two typical types of mobile shopper coined "need-it-now" and "killing-time" shoppers, and offers advice on meeting their needs.

"This shift is big--both technologically and behaviourally speaking," Lisa says, "Therefore, it's going to require solutions on both of these fronts."

Lisa recommends marketers and designers learn xHTML which is readable by both WAP2.0 and HTTP browsers though she notes that mobile browsers are increasingly able to interpret HTML more efficiently. A wealth of information on xHTML can be found at the [W3C](#), or at [xhtml.org](#).

This is the first major study of mobile search, one that is sure to provide a foundation for future research. It should be placed on the "must-read" list for all search marketers, site designers and online advertisers. Google, Yahoo, MSN and the rest understand the power of the portable personalized information environment. As users adapt to their new personalized space, mobile search is going to be one of the next ultra-important information environments.