

What's needed for the perfect mobile MySpace

Why is MySpace such a runaway success? Because it's a jack of all trades, apparently. This, at least, was the message from Frederick Ghahramani of technology firm AirG, speaking at today's MEX conference in London.

He was talking about mobile communities, but took time to explain why MySpace is such a hit, so that mobile companies can figure out how to emulate it. It's all down to the way it combines features of several other sites - Blogger's blogging, Photobucket's image-sharing, Match.com's dating features, topped off with a little bit of Napster's music preferences.

MySpace isn't better at any of these things than those sites, but the important thing is that it brought them all together in one service. "It's played the combination game of combining all these key building blocks, so there's a real multiplier effect which is what makes it sticky and successful," said Ghahramani.

Does this mean the most successful mobile communities will just look like MySpace? Probably not - mainly because MySpace can spread all these different elements over a PC-screen-sized webpage. Try doing that on a mobile phone.

"Screen size is a challenge for this combination play on mobile," he admitted. "How do you combine identity, presence and interaction on a mobile screen, as opposed to a PC screen? If there's going to be a combination play in mobile, its innovation will be a user-interface innovation."

Won't it all be about the online communities like MySpace extending onto mobile anyway? After all, MySpace has already signed deals in the US to be on handsets sold by MVNO operator Helio. Well, maybe, but as Ghahramani pointed out, these online firms face serious challenges making the leap to mobile.

"For them, it's a challenge of simplification," he said. "They've already figured out that consolidation makes success, but they'll also have to focus on user interface innovation to make this work on mobile."

He also pointed out that mobile handsets are a completely different world from the Web in terms of regulation. Online, anything goes on a service like MySpace - you can blog what you like, upload any photos you want, and even give out your home address and phone number if you like. Of course, these might get removed if someone complains, but the point is you can post them.

On mobile, the operators are so worried about complaints (think angry parents) that they impose a lot of restrictions. So often anything posted or uploaded to a mobile community has to be moderated before it appears by a computer, a human or both. Ghahramani said that the online communities have to decide whether they only offer a sanitized pre-filtered version of their content to mobile users, or whether they go back and re-moderate everything from scratch. Ouch.

If this all sounds a bit high falutin', rest assured that it's evidence that the mobile industry is grappling with these issues to make it completely seamless if you're accessing one of your existing communities - whether it's MySpace, Yahoo 360 or MSN Spaces - through your phone, you don't get fed up with the experience.

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Like I'm sure the spotty emo teenagers' HAWT!! profiles have nothing to do with the success of Myspace!

Damn emo-kids.

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