Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

The emergence of the global mobile application

Will national borders soon vanish—an obsolete idea found only in the annals of history? Not likely, but in the world of mobile communications they are certainly becoming increasingly blurred. And yet those borders do still exist. Companies must balance taking advantage of global opportunities while at the same time respecting regional and local differences that determine the success of a campaign.

The reasons for this "fuzziness" of long-standing boundaries are many. The most significant among these are the growing number of unifying cultural events and ideas, spanning diverse regions and cultures. These common experiences tend to make everyone who is a part of them feel as if they have some commonalities, and that they are part of a larger community. Sports, music, movies, and instant messaging are some examples of these unifying forces.

Also a factor is the plethora of transnational communities throughout the world. With expatriates wanting to keep in touch with family, friends, business colleagues, and their roots it is no surprise that mobile use in general, and data use specifically, is so prevalent between them. Sending a text message or IM from San Diego to Manila is simple, far less expensive than a phone call, and instantly bridges the vast ocean that lies between. The somewhat fascinating truth is that the current generation, growing up with these perceptions, will increasingly cement these perceptions as reality, and will question the usefulness and even importance of international borders for many things. So the trend should only be expected to accelerate.

But that is not to say that there aren't substantial differences between various locales around the world. Different languages, cultures, customs, and perceptions do—and always will—exist. To ensure successful deployment of global applications these factors must be taken into account. A marketing message that may be flawless in one country may be nonsense or actually offensive in another. Globally launched mobile campaigns and applications will always have to be varied to some degree for local markets, and it is enormously helpful to be familiar with the local market's nuances to ensure optimal results. That is a tall order, however; to coordinate all the local technologies, design & communication parameters, mobile operator connections, customs, and privacy laws for locations throughout the world.

Having native representation on the ground to coordinate a Global campaign's localized efforts with local systems is the best way to manage a rollout. Establishing connections with operators in a campaign's target countries can take a long time and be exceedingly complex. Adequate lead time and an experienced, agile partner like Mobile 365 are vital, since without connections the mobile campaign will go nowhere.

Not all mobile applications and campaigns fit the global model. Actually, the majority of Mobile 365's campaigns are regional or local, and those that are global almost always have localized components in support of the master campaign. Companies that regularly

utilize the global approach for applications and campaigns include those with content that is applicable cross-culturally.   Already we see major film studios, music labels, and sports leagues launching globally to take advantage of their strong brands and nurtured relationships with customers worldwide.   To deal with the complexities previously discussed, they tend to use a single aggregate vendor to do all of the leg work for them, rolling out their campaign seamlessly around the world—not instantly—but in quick succession as an organized, planned execution of the campaign. Reporting and analysis become even more important for global campaigns, as the ROI analysis can be difficult to interpret.

As the advent of the globally-networked game has been highly successful over the internet, the same phenomenon across mobile should soon be at least its equal.

Mobile communications applications are already on their way to total globalization. Microsoft wants customers to utilize their Hotmail accounts even when they're not in front of a PC, and all of the IM players are working to give their customers access to buddy lists via the mobile phone. Portals and search engines also need to provide a similar user experience when their customers are on the go (though just as on the Web these will be predominantly localized).

The number of mobile users across the world is approaching 2+ billion, based mostly in first-world nations. The next billion mobile users will come from developing countries in Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia, and companies with a global strategy will want to tap into these burgeoning markets for commerce and distribution. But to do so will take executing first and foremost at the local level.