

Consumers warm to the touch screen phone

– Getting the user interface right will be key to success, but a market exists

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For immediate release

Canalys today revealed more results from its recent consumer mobility survey, which show how receptive European consumers may be to emerging mobile phone design trends, such as the use of touch screens. The online survey was conducted in April among more than 2,000 employed, adult mobile phone users in France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK.

Following Apple's iPhone launch, several handset vendors have announced their own finger touch-screen devices, for example the LG Prada phone and the HTC Touch. Vendors going down the touch screen route face some big challenges, in gaining user acceptance, in winning over operators who have strong content and branding aspirations themselves, and not least in building an interface that actually works well all the time. The rewards, however, could be significant for those that manage to overcome these hurdles.

Regular, widespread use of mobile phones by consumers for applications beyond communications is still in its infancy in most countries. Less than 10% of those surveyed by Canalys were paying for and downloading ringtones, pictures, games, videos or music on a recurring basis, but more than twice as many had tried doing so at least once. In contrast, more than 70% of those whose phones had integrated cameras were using them regularly. Using the camera is, of course, free, but is also typically only one button press away.

“Although the user interface is only part of the solution to expanding the market, it is a critical part. You need compelling services and content, and transparent and fair pricing,” said Canalys senior analyst Pete Cunningham. “But if the interface gets in the way people will soon lose interest or choose other platforms to satisfy their needs. More than half of those we surveyed said they disliked having to learn where all the features were when they got a new phone.”

Phones that have a larger screen, giving more flexibility over the placement of application icons and having less reliance on the location of a limited number of fixed, physical keys could make more features and services accessible to more users. A bigger display also allows for more attractive advertising and presentation of content and, combined with a software-led, malleable interface, lends itself to the later addition of services by operators, without them being buried so far down a menu tree they are never found.

“User interface design is very easy to get wrong and you need to strike the right balance – promoting new or lesser-used services without compromising access to the features that people use every day,” added Mike Welch, Canalys VP. “The interface has to be responsive, and consistent all the way through – not just up to a point where suddenly another paradigm kicks in. And the standard features that people take for granted, like using predictive text, dialling numbers, finding and updating contacts and using the camera, must work at least as well as on a more conventional phone – it isn’t just about the advanced applications. If a customer picks up a phone in a retail store and can’t see how to do the basics within 20 seconds, they will walk away.”

Execution challenges aside, the Canalys survey reveals a high degree of acceptance among mobile phone users to the idea of using touch screen models. When asked about their personal phone preferences, 23% of respondents said that having a touch screen interface would be good if it meant they got a large display, but without increasing the overall size of the phone. A further 10% were prepared to make a trade-off by ending up with a larger phone in return for a large touch screen or a good keyboard. Only 28% said categorically that they just wanted a traditional numeric keypad while another 24% said that having a small phone was the priority regardless of input method used. Acceptance of touch screen phones was up to 50% higher among those who had high interest in having mobile TV services, mobile e-mail or handset-based GPS navigation, or who already used most of the features on their current phones. But the requirement that the larger screen did not result in a larger phone remained strong across all these groups.

About the Consumer Mobility Analysis service

The research results discussed in this release come from the new Canalys Consumer Mobility Analysis EMEA service, which provides clients with analysis of results from a continuous programme of large-scale consumer surveys. Each quarter, different mobility topics and country markets within EMEA are covered by the survey to provide monitoring of trends and reaction to new initiatives, products and services. In addition to analysis of the survey results, clients receive regular reports, supporting databases and direct access to Canalys analysts. More information is available from the Canalys web site.

About Canalys

Canalys specialises in delivering high quality market data, analysis and advice to the world’s leading technology vendors. It is recognised as a key provider of continuous advisory services and confidential custom projects for marketing managers and strategists within blue-chip IT, telecoms, navigation and consumer electronics companies. It has unrivalled expertise in European routes to market for all kinds of high technology products and services in the consumer, SMB and large enterprise segments, and provides worldwide market data and trends analysis.

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