

## Mobile Phone Service Branding Beyond The Third Age

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### The Battle For Brand Loyalty

As the mobile phone industry approaches saturation, branding becomes an ever more vital issue. Nearly everyone has and uses the service (or if they have not, probably never will!) so the battle is on to make your existing customers loyal and win over your competitors customers to your own network.

But loyal customers need genuine, conscious reasons. The importance of branding has never been greater.

### Beyond The Third Age Of Branding

Most marketers believe that we are now living in what might be termed “The Third Age” of branding. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century we were in what might be termed the “Functional” age. The number of competitors was fewer and the concern was to re-assure customers that they were buying a special function or that they were getting the “genuine” article. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the development of the “Emotional” age when customers were encouraged to “identify” with particular brands. This age saw the rise of celebrity endorsements as a key strategy. Since then the “Conceptual/Intellectual/Philosophical” Age has held sway. This includes brand strategies that communicate certain values such as “fair-trade” or “environmentally friendly.”

However many of these strategies are too narrow in base to suit many mobile communication companies. A different approach is needed.

### Societal Trends Change The Landscape

In North America and Europe a new class of people has been emerging. The “money-rich, time-poor” have more disposable income but less disposable time. Because of this they are willing to pay a little extra for quality products that are well targeted to their specific needs.

Simultaneously we are seeing an ending of the love affair with technology amongst the general population. Of course the genuine geeks will always be turned on by the latest gizmos. But the average man in the street no longer blindly believes that something is good just because it is new. He needs convincing that a new product or service will provide him with a genuine benefit.

So the mobile phone industry's typical brand strategies of "latest and greatest technology", "price leader" or "hip and cool" may not be the best fit for society as it is developing today.

### **A Competitive Opportunity**

Various studies have shown that today's mobile phone users are not happy with their current supplier. In fact they are not happy with the industry as a whole. A study by the University of Michigan amongst the public showed that the US mobile phone industry was rated at number 39 out of a field of other service industries. It just managed to scrape in ahead of the used car sales industry.

It seems that the public feel that the mobile phone industry is just not delivering.

The opportunity is therefore there for mobile phone companies to take better targeted leadership positions in key subsections of society. Of course the first operator to achieve such a position is likely to retain it, unless he gives it away!

### **Achieving A Leadership Position**

So how can a mobile phone operator achieve a leadership position in multiple sections of society?

The first step is to fully understand the composition of their market and how it might be sensibly divided up. The next is to conclude winning propositions for each segment.

So far, so good: all pretty standard marketing stuff.

However, most operators find it very difficult to implement the detailed and specific features and tariffs, especially for pre-paid segments, that are required to deliver truly winning propositions.

Good intentions are too often defeated by the restriction of legacy, often proprietary, IN platforms. New features are simply too difficult to implement. They are also too expensive.

It is usually possible to make a small number of changes for some segments. However operators usually stand no chance of implementing the large number of changes needed to reach multiple segments.

### **The Killer Environment**

The answer is not to seek for a killer application. Even if there were such single solution, it would quickly be replicated by other operators. It would quickly be neutralized.

Instead operators should be seeking to set up a “killer environment” which allows them to rapidly introduce new services and new tariffs in large numbers. The aim should be to create a whole series of “mini killer applications” which are compelling for key groups because they are so well targeted.

This must mean a move away from proprietary architecture towards a more open structure which allows much more rapid application development. One example of such an architecture is the JAIN SLEE platform.

A SLEE is a high throughput, low latency event processing application environment. JAIN SLEE is the Java standard for SLEE.

JAIN SLEE is designed to allow implementations of the standard to meet the stringent requirements of communications applications, such as network signaling applications. The JAIN SLEE specification is designed so that implementations can achieve scalability and availability through clustering architectures.

JAIN SLEE is the industry standard aimed at portable communications applications, i.e. a communications application can be written once and run on many different implementations of JAIN SLEE. Application portability is made possible by the combination of a programming language API (specified using the Java programming language), an unambiguous technical specification, a Reference Implementation, and a rigorous suite of tests that a vendor must pass before their product is compliant with the JAIN SLEE specification.

The net result is a much more agile applications development platform. This makes the rapid development of “mini killer applications” a practical proposition

### **Quality For The Third Age**

The money-rich, time-poor sector of the market place is set to grow and grow. They value appropriate (for them) features and time saving above low pricing, celebrity endorsements and high tech gadgetry. The first mobile operators to recognize this and



formulate a determined strategy around it will develop a very valuable position and a long term access to high margin business.