

## Getting mobile on the Web

### A voice for the consumer

Victoria Shannon



Hadi Farahani

The "mobile Internet" has been the technology industry's chant now for almost a decade, ever since Apple popularized a wireless standard in its PowerBooks and cellphone towers started transmitting text as well as spoken conversation to our handsets.

And it is true that today, radio signals and hotel managements willing, we can fill out reports, write e-mail messages and send photos remotely, whether by clicking a few buttons on our camera-phones or firing up the Wi-Fi on our laptops.

But even when we have a high-powered cellphone at our disposal — AND have gone through the contortions with the carrier and the phone's settings to enable a data subscription — how many of us are actually surfing the Web on the way to work or in the dentist's waiting room? After a decade of effort, most smart phones are too smart for their own good, and the mobile Internet is still too cramped and costly for the mass market.

But there is hope. The British arm of the online technology news service Cnet recently ferreted out a handful of tasks that even you can do with your phone that proves the value of accessing text on a cellphone. We're not talking mobile spreadsheets here. Without actually saying so, Cnet has put its finger on the combination of factors that has by and large eluded mobile services that have tried so hard to win us over: give us something simple, cheap and useful.

#### **Here are some of those tools:**

A fun and simple introduction to mobile data services is Shazam, a name-that-tune technology for cellphones. Dial a number, listen for the prompt and hold your handset up to the music. Shazam will hang up after 20 seconds, and then send you a text message with the artist and song title.

The phone number to access Shazam is different in each of 19 territories, including Japan, Taiwan and Thailand. The Shazam Web site also links to ways to buy the song that you identify. Shazam says its music recognition technology does not work on live music or classical music.

ZYB is a backup service for your phone numbers and text messages. You set it up on the Web site of ZYB, which is where you can also find out if your particular phone model is supported.

After that, the free service is all transacted wirelessly from wherever you are, provided you have data subscription and the proper phone configuration. A bonus: You can also back up the contacts on your iPod.

In the slightly more sophisticated category, Google offers a free software program that lets you get maps and gives you directions on your phone. Even when mobile, I tend to rely on the maps that go with the local Yellow Pages in France because I'm used to it, but Google is certainly a reliable consumer technology name. Its mobile maps are interactive and you can even look at satellite images on your tiny screen, though I am not sure of the value.

Then there are the trivia-question services, a search-engine equivalent for the fourth screen (after movie, television and computer). In Britain, there are AQA (for "all questions answered") and 82ASK. Send a text message, and get an answer from a combination of human beings and computers. Each answer costs £1, or \$1.92.

If you find that these services are useful, easy enough to work and not too constrained by your cellphone viewing area, you may be well on your way to a real mobile Internet.

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Who dominates the Internet audience today? ComScore Networks recently released its 2006 update, concluding that China now represents the second-largest Internet market after the United States.

Chinese users grew by 20 percent last year, while the audience in India shot up the most — 33 percent over 2005 — compared to 2 percent growth in the U.S. market. Overall, global Internet usage grew 10 percent last year to 747 million users age 15 or older, comScore said.

Globalization students, take note: Canadians, Israelis and South Koreans spend the most time online, followed by Americans and Britons. And Internet users outside the United States now account for 80 percent of the world's online population.

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