

# apple seeds new age

*For the next few years at least, 'share of phone' will be a more crucial battleground than 'share of mind'. Who will be the winners? Jef Loeb phones a friend...*

Steve Jobs, the smartest man on the planet, wants to control the world. Google, the smartest company on the planet, probably thinks it already does. While Microsoft, Yahoo!, Time-Warner, Omnicom, WPA and Publicis - scary, smart folks one and all - spend every waking hour plotting ways, if a global empire isn't still on the cards, to still wind up with a decent sized duchy.

Why do I focus the all-seeing eye on those who seek control of media content? Well, now that the post-Cannes hangovers have finally settled - I had one because I was drowning my bitterness at being stuck on the distaff side of the pond; you had one because, er, you were there - it's appropriate to indulge in some good old fashioned handicapping.

Because the evidence suggests that control of the advertising world will, increasingly, revolve around who controls that thing in your pocket. I am referring, oh ye of filthy mind, to your mobile phone.

Following the good advice given by the Cheshire Cat to Alice in her Wonderland, the right place to begin this conversation is at the beginning. And that, inevitably, takes us to a bit of news that you may have only glanced at while adding to your blood caffeine/alcohol count as you sauntered along la Croisette - the introduction of the second generation Apple iPhone.

Featuring the same come-hither sex appeal as the original, the big upgrade for this iconic bit of gadgetry is the data-supporting technology it sports. If this performs as advertised, it will bring us frighteningly close to the Jobs-promised nirvana of a truly mobile worldwide web.

Translation: mobile is suddenly poised to add an

unexpected dimension to broadband/broadcast convergence. Like a stalker, the damned internet will start following us around.

Whether that's happy news or not is something history can arbitrate. But it does suggest that advertisers and agencies, sensing freedom from the constrictions of living rooms, computers and perhaps even gravity, will cast lustful eyes at that little portable device with its great big promotional potential.

Having trouble getting your brand to intersect with frenetic consumers in a media-shattered world? Don't worry; your logo can appear on the mobile as frequently as the highly irritating TV network bugs - which Wikipedia tells us are called DOGs (Digital Onscreen Graphics) in Australia - that populate every nano-moment of the broadcast day. Shift that potential up a gear in a fully converged world - telly blending into computer blending into mobile device - and you begin to see why the vision is producing better results than Viagra in an agency executive suite. Hats off honour is especially due to Steve Jobs and the Apple wizards for nailing this far ahead of anyone else. In fact, let's double the kudos, since the iPhone, in tandem with Apple TV - Jobs' bid to extend his world in your home - represents a brilliant double play for integrated control over the consumer-facing channels of information and entertainment distribution.

So what happens at the end of the movie? Does boy get world? Does Google gracefully concede territory? Will the agency networks get it right this time when, under similar formative conditions in the 1990s, they got it so very wrong on the internet? Inquiring minds don't want to

wait for the credits to find out, so I pulled out my iPhone - what else? - and dialled Tony Levitan, serial entrepreneur, co-founder of Egreetings, and, as it happens, someone making a play in this space via Lexy.com. (Full disclosure: yours truly is helping the company on the advertising front). He says: "Many still see the phone primarily as a communications device - but it's fast becoming a vehicle for information and entertainment. We also know that people will accept mobile ads, audio as well as visual, that come with delivered value, just like they do with TV."

He then highlights the practical benefits: "The mobile is an extremely high quality, quick response sampling device that works through the eyes and ears. That makes it an extremely powerful medium that can influence both consumer engagement and the consequences." But that doesn't mean Levitan is willing to call it "Apple one, competition nil". In fact, he believes that "mobile will be the great equaliser" for two reasons. First, the small screen size means it's not an easy get for Google - or anyone delivering content that's primarily visually driven. Second, the advent of flat rate mobile service pricing from operators like Sprint and Virgin Mobile will be transformative. "In 1999, flat rate pricing from AOL meant people could stop thinking that they were paying for the internet and start dreaming up new things to do with it. That was the primary catalyst for web 2.0. The same will happen when flat rate is the rule in mobile."

If Levitan is right, who winds up controlling the world in your pocket is anyone's guess.

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