

Why reinvent the web for mobile phones?

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Eran Wyler, CEO of InfoGin, argues that while dotMobi may seek to revolutionise the use of the internet on mobile devices, there are still some serious issues to be addressed.

The WWW2006 conference saw industry leaders pushing for developments in specially created web-style content for the world's two billion mobile devices with researchers and companies keen to replicate the success of the original web. Meanwhile, brands rushed to register dotMobi domain names after the initiative declared it was down to individual websites to deliver content in a mobile-ready format.

The dotMobi organisation, sponsored by mobile operators, claims that "dotMobi will revolutionise the use of the internet on mobile devices... dotMobi is designed to guide mobile users to made-for-mobile internet content and services that can be accessed with confidence."

dotMobi actually tries to address the need for more content on mobile devices but it doesn't give a solution for the content providers community. Individuals will still need to redesign and rewrite their content in WAP (2.0) and/or i-mode and/or new standards. Instead of having a new suffix (.mobi), today's technologies are able to simply identify a mobile device that tries to access a website, and it automatically directs users to the mobile version of this web site they are familiar with.

So why reinvent the web when internet users are happy with the websites and services that already exist? Although WAP and i-mode exist, most of the internet content including the top sites either don't have a mobile version, don't work on mobile devices, or the results are very poor.

And what about the multi-technology gaps that exist between mobile device manufacturers? Are we going back to a lowest common denominator concept or will all relevant players start to develop systems according to the same specifications? (I am sure that the answers are obvious).

So did we miss something? Yes. One of the key concerns in this initiative is the time and effort a content provider must put into the project in order to create a mobile version. This key issue is not addressed by the dotMobi initiative.

The other issue remaining is the end-user experience. Even if a content provider writes a mobile version, it will be different and will not include all the original website offerings. The end product could even be perceived as a different site – a site the user is not familiar with.

The dotMobi concept is all about giving the end user a list of certified working sites available for mobile phones and standards behind the domain name. But what is the difference from the WAP 2.0 or i-mode standards? As I see it, users want the whole of the web and dotMobi won't be able to deliver this without serious efforts from all sides (including the content providers).

Therefore the issue should be solved from a different direction – for example, solutions which automatically adapt the original site to the mobile device's physical and functional capabilities. This solution must provide the best content presentation and ease of use for even the smallest device. We need to provide users with what that they are really looking for – the World Wide Web!