

The no brainer



Tony discovers ways of handling data

The other day I saw the phrase 'a seamless transfer of data with no user intervention required' – what the Americans might call a no brainer. It's about ways of persuading handset owners to utilise the inherent data capabilities of their mobiles, and making it dead simple to do so. It seems that the mobile phone industry has finally realised that people will only use mobile phones for data applications if it's not just simple but virtually transparent. You can see it happening already through the Mobile Data Association's figures. It shows millions of Wap page downloads performed by people who wouldn't recognise a browser if it hit them. They are simply downloading ringtones from Wap-based sites without even realising.

So what other areas could benefit from this process? The obvious answer is Picture Messaging. MMS is so under-used, the practice hasn't even entered popular slang. When did you last hear: 'You promised to pixt me?' Hunting around for a solution I came across Cognima's Snap. It's proved to be a lifesaver but not as I'd originally expected. It takes all the snaps from your handset and bungs them onto the web so you can easily publish them for others to view. And it performs this task without any user intervention, but it also synchronises your handset's address book. Make changes on the web and they're reflected inside your phone. Change your phone and it updates your internet-stored address book. Brilliant.

Purple Ace has a similar system called Ripple Contacts. Purple Ace developed the application as spin-off software set up to help network operators sell more content. The company's Ripple Premium Client, for example, effectively enables the ordinary person to share content with his or her mates. Users send what appears to be just an ordinary text message, while the necessary links to a content site are buried away inside the message. Another company, Celltick, provides what is effectively a tickertape feed that scrolls across the handset's screen in place of a screensaver. Basically, Celltick can send a constant stream of content 'teasers' to virtually any handset you can name. It's a bit intrusive but then Celltick claims that customers see numbers using data services rise from about 5% to around 30%. And what do they all have in common? Even ardent technophobes could use them.

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