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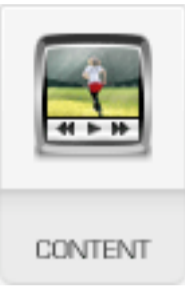
EDITOR'S CHOICE

[Phones as Hackable Platfo... \(+91\)](#)
By [Douglas Rushkoff](#), Nov 24, 2004

MOBILE PUSH? HAVEN'T WE SEEN THIS MOVIE BEFORE?

[Mike Masnick](#) Wed Dec 22 23:00:00 GMT 2004
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**As everyone is trying to figure out how to make content work on the phone, one idea is to push content quietly to the phone, but let it be interactive. It sounds quite similar to the ill-fated "push" concept of the dot com days, but does it make more sense when mobile?**

In late 1996 and early 1997, the rage of the Internet was Pointcast, the champion of "push" technology. In an age of a relatively slow Internet, the idea was that an application, such as Pointcast, would bring down a ton of information quietly in the background, placing it on the local device where it could be dealt with faster. As many people remember, it was wildly popular. In some ways, too wildly popular: it overwhelmed networks, it was buggy and it was limited only to the content that Pointcast agreed to put

into its system

Eventually, the web won out, helped along by a wider variety of content, an openness that made more innovative applications available and increasingly faster and more reliable Internet connections. While push had its proponents -- especially among many in the media industry who could identify with push technology much more easily than the open and interactive Internet -- it failed to be more than a flash in the pan.

However, with the ongoing struggle to figure out the "content" market for the mobile environment, it appears that there's a return to something that sounds very much like Pointcast-style push technology. While others are focused on moving [broadcast-style TV to mobile phones](#), some have been moving forward with what is called [Interactive Mobile Broadcasting](#).

The idea is that, just like with Pointcast, the content is downloaded in the background. While the phone is "idle," the content displays on the screen -- just like a screensaver. It's not intrusive. It doesn't bother the user at all, but simply appears silently. It can be news, weather, sports or whatever the operator wants to provide. The subscriber can then click through for more information, making an active move to get the information, but making it easier than going through a typical mobile web or WAP portal.

There's clearly some demand for this. It's being used in China and India, and it appears that people are definitely making use of it. Of course, a lot of people used Pointcast as well. While this doesn't have the problem of overloading the network that Pointcast had, it does require maintaining this separate broadcast network. Furthermore, as Pointcast discovered, this solution is totally limited to what content the providers decide to offer through it. While many mobile operators are still stuck in a walled garden mentality, as the networks increasingly open up, and outside developers are encouraged to make use of the network in new and innovative ways, the idea of staying within walled gardens becomes less interesting. Furthermore, as cellular networks improve in bandwidth and devices become more powerful, the more annoying part of mobile web surfing starts to go away. That's not to say this version of mobile push doesn't have potential -- but providers would be wise to [pay attention to the lessons that Pointcast learned painfully](#), and try to avoid them. Otherwise, the future of this mobile push will be quite similar to the history of Internet push.

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COMMENTS

Future of WAP

Great article Mike! My question is whether WAP would have any future both in Europe and US. What's your take?

Carpe Diem!

[baldwinn](#)

Thu Dec 23 20:38:10 GMT 2004

Score: +2 Interesting

It's here, it's ready, it's proven to make money - but can you get anyone to invest in it? (hint: answer is 'no')

Oh, how I wish I had some spare cash, or a friendly investor. We as a company have had this content ready to go for 2 years, at a price and business model that's already been proven to work (since we're providing the content that other people are making money from), and there's a damn simple way of implementing it. Especially as you can now get the receiving application embedded in your handset.

[apcro](#)

Mon Dec 27 13:30:07 GMT 2004

Score: +2

Odd, this predicate ...

I find this commentary odd, its predicate -- that Pointcast-style push died in the early days of the web -- completely false.

Indeed, the cache has been growing for communications from a time that predates Pointcast. Many companies offer technology that pre-loads a cache with content on the odd chance we'll choose to use it, and my home web connection does this constantly in the background (my connectivity is by satellite, and Hughes uses an acceleration technology).

Nor is there any question at all that this is a big part of our future. Indeed, broadcast push into a cache for subsequent interactivity is the very model for Tivo and coming audio-Tivo approaches.

Asynchronous use of digits is alive and well, growing stronger over time. It will see use in mobility without a question. As for Pointcast, they simply missed cashing in on the cache; They at one-time rejected a \$500 million offer for the company -- Big Mistake!

[Griffin747](#)

Mon Dec 27 20:19:10 GMT 2004

Score: +2 Interesting