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Android Widens Reach For Mobile Search, Brand Marketers

Laurie Sullivan, Dec 11, 2008 07:30 AM



Google swung open the doors to mobile search marketing when it introduced the Android operating system and developer network. Now 14 new members are stepping on for the ride. Some believe it gives mobile marketing the credibility it seeks.

Joining the Open Handset Alliance--the consortium supporting application development on Android OS--are: AKM Semiconductor, ARM, ASUSTeK Computer, Atheros Communications, Borqs,

Ericsson, Garmin International, Huawei Technologies, Omron Software, Softbank Mobile, Sony Ericsson, Teleca, Toshiba, and the world's largest mobile operator, Vodafone.

While Google may provide handset makers with a seasoned OS and search platform, the developer network gives search and brand marketers new opportunities to reach consumers via their mobile phone. Take, for example, Shop Savvy from Dallas-based Big in Japan. When a consumer takes a picture of any UPC bar code with the phone, the application brings up a search page with local listings related to the product.

Tim LaGrone---mobile search practice lead at Outrider, a division of GroupM Search, Saint Louis--got the G1 one week ago and has not picked up his iPhone since. "I scan the bar code and the Shop Savvy application provides me a list of local and Internet stores that carry the product," he said.

The GPS system on the phone helps the application identify the consumer's location. "There has been some struggle to identify the location of users and give them the right message, but on programs like Shop Savvy, the location pops up on the phone," he said. "Today the application is based more on pricing rather than ads, but Google has expressed interest in advertisers placing ads on some of the apps being developed in the network."

One of Outrider's clients saw an 81% difference in CTR when targeting iPhone (full Web browser) users compared with targeting users that ran standard WAP browser ads.

Today, Shop Savvy only runs on the T-Mobile G1 phone, but Big in Japan is working on a similar application for the Apple iPhone and the BlackBerry Storm. Chris Copeland, CEO at GroupM Search in the Americas, said it will likely take between 12 and 18 months until marketers see real value of the G1, as more applications are built.

When it comes to mobile, it's all about scale, said Aaron Goldman, VP of marketing and strategic partnerships at Resolution Media, an Omnicom Media Group company. He notes that not many consumers search the mobile Web in the U.S., compared with other countries, but that's due to a "clunky browser experience" on handsets.

While Apple's iPhone attempted to change that perception early on, penetration is still low. In

comes the Google G1 phone from Taiwanese manufacturer HTC supported by T-Mobile in the United States, and soon Australian manufacturer Kogan will release the Agora and the Agora Pro. Both run on Android and have similar features, such as the 2.5-inch touchscreen and QWERTY keyboard, but the regular version lacks the camera and Google bar code search option. Motorola also has said it will launch handsets based on Android OS next year.

"Cobbling handset manufacturers, carriers, and other mobile players, such as Garmin, into the Android alliance is crucial to gain scale and make developers invest time and money into making the cool applications that will drive usage and, in turn, advertising dollars," Goldman said. "Sony Ericsson is a nice addition for the alliance but AT&T and Verizon Wireless remain conspicuously missing. It's like Google's open social push--it will never reach ubiquity without Facebook."