

The Year of Mobile Email and Backup and Restore for the Masses

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Royal Tunbridge Wells, February 1, 2008. - 2008 will be the year when mobile email and backup and restore for mobile devices take off, in particular in emerging markets. We will see massive growth in mobile email in the consumer space due to the successful adoption of industry standards such as IMAP (LEMONADE) and SyncML, bringing high-value services to low-cost devices. Additionally, as many users now use their phone as the only repository for storing contact information, we will see an increase in operators offering consumers backup and restore services to insure their social networks when devices are lost, stolen, or upgraded.

For years, mobile operators have been striving to increase ARPU from mobile data services: MMS, mobile TV, user created content, and mobile social networking, to name some, but these services have so far enjoyed limited success. We are now seeing signs that the market for consumer mobile email is set to grow exponentially from eight million accounts last year to a massive 184 million consumer mobile email accounts by 2011*.

The popularity of email will drive increased mobile data usage and, therefore, ARPU.

Mobile Email for the Masses

Until recently, mobile email use has been limited to business users who can afford to buy an expensive smartphone and are willing to accept a costly data plan. But there have been strong signs over the course of 2007 that the age of mobile email for the masses is upon us. The combination of the adoption of industry standards enabling push email on mass market feature phones and affordable service plans is set to make mobile email for the mass market a reality. Evidence of this shift is seen in particular in emerging markets, where fixed-line infrastructure is limited and PC penetration is low, whilst mobile phone penetration is soaring.

It is my belief that the mobile operators in emerging markets now have the opportunity to make the mobile phone the primary method of accessing the internet, with mobile email probably being the most popular application for both business users and consumers. As a result, I can see mobile email consumption in the emerging markets of Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe leapfrogging the 'developed world' in Western Europe and the U.S., which will mostly remain limited to high-end business user email.

However, to make this happen, it is important to use middleware that can support the majority of the mobile phones that are already out there in those markets. Communication

only works if it can be sent and received; so, by using standards such as IMAP (LEMONADE), SyncML, and email-to-SMS conversion, we will see email and synchronization services extended to every single mobile phone on the planet.

While we are all drawn to sexy new devices such as the Apple iPhone, the fact is that smartphones represent only a tiny portion of the addressable market. The vast majority of phones in use today (and in the foreseeable future) are mass market feature phones. Therefore, it is essential for service providers to offer push email and synchronization solutions that work well on the phones that are already in users' hands today. In 2008, the time is right for mobile data pricing plans to fall and, as customer numbers increase, we will start to see mobile email becoming the next generation SMS.

The problem today is that most mobile email solutions are based on proprietary protocols, requiring users to download additional client software. This approach is set to fail in the mass market, where the overwhelming majority are using feature phones that cannot effectively use proprietary clients. Time and again it has been proven that consumers won't adopt services that are hard to setup or difficult to use. They want to be able to use mobile services on standard mobile phones right out of the box - no software installation, no fiddly configuration, no expensive proprietary devices.

The only viable option is for service providers to use open standards to interface with the built-in email applications that are shipping pre-installed with the vast majority of devices today, enabling both smartphone and mass market feature phones to receive push email or converting email to SMS so that the message can be received on even the most basic phones. Once they have gotten that part sorted out, operators need to ensure a seamless setup by adding automatic client provisioning of the built-in email and synchronization applications.

Backup and Restore for the Masses

I also expect to see a surge in demand from consumers for a backup-and-restore facility for their mobile devices in 2008. This is because consumers depend increasingly on their mobile devices as the primary repository for vital information such as phone numbers and addresses. If a person's phone is lost or stolen or upgraded, then all his or her contact details disappear with it. For most users today, it is the information on the phone, rather than the device itself, which is of highest value.

We will therefore see an increase in demand for a low-cost facility from service providers - a kind of insurance policy for personal information - which will allow consumers to backup and restore their contact information over the air. As well as providing a safety net for consumers who lose their phones, a backup and restore service also makes upgrading to a new phone easier. Customers simply use the backup and restore facility to transfer their contact information and saved SMS messages over the air to their new phone.

Again, the only viable means of doing this is for service providers to offer easy to use, standards-based solutions that work with the majority of devices already in the market. This calls for SyncML-based solutions that work with the native applications on devices, rather than requiring a complicated download. To setup those applications automatically also calls for seamless client provisioning. This combination of capabilities makes a backup and restore service easy and appealing for the mass market, driving rapid take-up rates.

Conclusion

In summary, 2008 will see the mass market benefiting from recent advances in data synchronization and messaging facilitated by middleware based on open industry standards. Mobile email will start to explode, in particular in emerging markets, which will leapfrog the so-called developed world. And more service providers will begin to offer their subscribers a robust over-the-air backup and restore facility to insure their social networks.

*Source: Visiongain Mobile Email Market Report

Background Information

Synchronica's Mobile Gateway push email and synchronization middleware provides carrier-grade scalability with load balancing and failover on any J2EE application server using Solaris, Linux, or Windows servers. It supports IMAP / SMTP for email and includes support for both the IMAP Idle and OMA EMN industry standards for push email. In addition, it includes support for SyncML (OMA DS) for the synchronization of calendars, contacts, notes, and tasks. For service activation, it features a provisioning module (OMA CP), enabling over-the-air configuration of the built-in IMAP / SMTP and SyncML clients.

Database of compatible devices: <http://www.synchronica.com/products/compatible-mobile-devices.php>

Information to setup your free mobile email trial: <http://www.synchronica.com/syncml-demos/demos.html>

Synchronica's Mobile Backup solution includes support for SyncML (OMA DS) for backing up and restoring contact and calendar data on the majority of mobile phones in the market today. It also features an automatic provisioning module (OMA CP) that enables remote, over-the-air automated setup of the service for subscribers.

More about Synchronica: <http://www.synchronica.com>

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