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5 developments that will shape the mobile landscape

By **Moshe Vaknin**

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With two major mobile ad network acquisitions within the past two months, the easiest prediction to make for mobile is to say that more mobile ad networks will be acquired in 2010.

But beyond the growth of smartphones -- both in terms of net users and in terms of usage per user -- here is a list of the underlying marketing drivers for growth (and more acquisitions) in the mobile industry.

1. Social networking will go mobile

Beyond location-driven social networks like Foursquare and Gowalla, social networking is going mobile. Facebook is one of the fastest growing mobile websites, and that growth trend will only accelerate in 2010. Mobile is a logical extension of what socializing is all about; status updates like "I'm hungry" are really only relevant to those in our proximity who can meet up for a bite to eat.

Though some of the new locally targeted functionality on social networks might be an attempt from the existing social networks to pre-empt new mobile-specific social networks such as Foursquare, I believe that location-based features, including maps with friends or the ability to geo-target status updates, are the next phase in the evolution of social networking.

2. Geo-location will help drive the growth for mobile commerce

While apps have driven the growth of mobile commerce, I believe comparison shopping will build a bridge between online and bricks-and-mortar commerce. Imagine you're in a local retailer looking for a juicer; wouldn't you want to know if the model on the shelf in front of you is \$10 cheaper in a store down the road?

Comparison shopping is already driving revenue for online retailers who provide comparison shopping functionality. The ability to do so locally and in real-time will increase both actual mobile commerce (where we buy the product via our mobile phone) as well as through comparison shopping.

3. Mobile games will grow, particularly mobile social games

Along with the explosive growth of games on social networks, which will definitely continue in 2010, I also expect to see new localized functionality in social games. Putting a game on a mobile device increases game time when users are away from their PC. For a game like FarmVille, I expect to see ways to perhaps "borrow hay or water" from your local friends. Perhaps there will even be functionality that allows real-world meet-ups for local participants in these virtual games.

4. Non-phone mobile communications will eventually surpass mobile phone calls

In conjunction with the growth of mobile social networking, other forms of social interaction will increase, led by instant messaging. With increased multi-tasking -- and because it isn't always convenient to pick

up the phone and call someone -- we'll see a greater share of mobile communications migrating from phone to other communications vehicles this year.

5. Augmented reality is more hype than reality

As someone with more than a decade of experience in online advertising, I'm excited by the "how cool is that?" factor of augmented reality. Unfortunately, in these austere times in which we now live, we need more. Namely, an "easy-to-show-your-boss ROI" factor.

Augmented reality will grow in 2010, but we'll need a year like 1999 for augmented reality to realize its fullest potential, and I just don't see us returning to 1999.

If the first week of the new year is any indication, 2010 will (finally) be a very exciting year for mobile.

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