

Mobile web reaches critical mass

The mobile web has reached a "critical mass" of users this year, according to a report by analysts Nielsen Mobile.

The US is the most tech savvy nation with nearly 40 million Americans - 16% of all US mobile users - using their handset to browse on the move.

The UK and then Italy come a close second and third in the 16 countries surveyed by the analyst firm.

Indonesia has the lowest take-up with just 1.1% of mobile subscribers using their handsets for surfing the web.

The firm believes the growth of the mobile web is a combination of increasing numbers of user friendly handsets, higher speed networks and unlimited data packages.

"The adoption and the experience are improving at an impressive rate," said Nic Covey, Nielsen Mobile's director of insights.

Blind spot

In the US, the number of people using the mobile web has increased from 22.4 million in 2006 to more than 40 million today.

However, the firm found that roughly 95 million Americans were paying for mobile web access but did not necessarily use the service.

"The mobile internet is often included as part of a larger mobile media package," the report said.

"Users may be either unaware or disinterested in the internet access that is provided."

This is not true of owners of certain handsets, such as the first generation iPhone.

The firm found that 82% of iPhone owners access the mobile internet, "making them five times as likely to do so as the average mobile consumer".

The second generation iPhone is released on 11 July and will come with 3G, allowing faster access to the web.

However, the most popular handset in the US for browsing is the Motorola RAZR, whilst in Europe it is Nokia's N95.

Nokia handsets are also the most popular in China, India and Russia.

The survey found that most people use the web to check email, visit social networks and carry out bank transactions.

Well known brands such as Yahoo and Google were the most popular sites.

However, the firm found that browsing habits differed between a PC and the small screen.

"PC internet users visit more than 100 domains per month, on average," the report said.

"By contrast, the average mobile internet user in the US visited 6.4 individual websites per month."

UK use was slightly less at 5.5 per month, whilst Italian users visit 8.2 per month on average. The authors attribute this to Italians using more sophisticated handsets.

Growth like this means the mobile web is now a viable option for big business, the authors said.

"Mobile internet reached a critical mass this year, offering a large and diverse enough base of users to support large-scale mobile marketing efforts," they said.