

COLUMNS

## How a year in the life of mobile can equal a lifetime

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Call it a miracle.

It has only been a few short weeks since you have brought home your twinkling little wonder and already it is doing things great things that surprise you.

Day by day, hour by hour, you can almost watch its intricate wiring make vital connections and, in so doing, learn about the world through their and your eyes. Its life-changing potential on day one is no comparison to what your little "miracle of evolution" can do 365 days later.

The "miracle" I am talking about is not your child, but rather your mobile device.

No kidding

But some of the parallels between mobile technological developments and infants are striking.

Both are "born" with great potential to grow and expand their capabilities. Tapping into that potential, however, requires the right combination of experiences and environmental nurturing. For smartphones, that translates into using all of its smart features.

Very often, excited parents will sit by and watch their children hit cognitive mile marker after cognitive mile marker: a child's recognition of a parent, his first steps, and his first words all signal that "things are on track."

What parents do not do is extrapolate from 12 months of data and experience the full-on adult potential of their children.

Are some predictions critical? Absolutely.

But parents and pediatricians are quick to counsel a slower approach, letting the child explore his world at his own pace and in his own time.

In other words, parents are advised to sit back and watch their miracle unfold, focusing more on helping their children achieve goals rather than just setting them.

As human beings we are also the collective parents of mobile devices.

And like infants, their worlds can change radically in the 31,536,000 seconds that make up a year as their "brain power" computer data storage capacity and processing speed steadily increases.

While data like Moore's Law the predicted two-year doubling, or more like 18 months, of the number of transistors that can fit on a microchip is helpful at the macro-level in estimating the power of computing, it is of very little

guidance when it comes down to tech trends, overnight sensations, and predictions in our always-connected society.

The bottom line is that smartphones and tablets have infiltrated nearly every aspect of life just like wide-eyed and mostly smiling children.

While becoming a successful parent involves getting up to speed with and nurturing their potential, it remains to be seen if mobile marketers are truly keeping pace with theirs.

It's still a feature phone world? Not for long

The above subhead underscores the rate of change taking place and the foolishness of making year-long, or even quarter-long predictions.

"It's Still a Feature Phone World" was the headline of a Techcrunch article that was posted on Nov. 28, 2011.

In it, the article spoke about how despite all the hoopla surrounding the technology, smartphones remained a gadget still on hold for the majority of people.

Industry officials and admittedly some of my clients repeatedly reminded my company that in the race for mobile adoption, that standard mobile phones not be left out of the mix. The article estimated North American smartphone adoption rate at 63 percent.

But a just a 100 or so days later, that headline sounds decidedly antiquated. Why?

Because earlier this month the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project released its findings that in the United States alone, smartphone adoption rates had jumped 11 percent 35 percent to 46 percent from May 2011 to February 2012.

And with 88 percent of U.S. consumers owning a smartphone or standard phone, the percentage of smartphone-touting Americans rose to 53 percent.

With this kind of short-term jump in ownership, it is likely that the 63 percent North American smartphone adoption average from only a few months ago needs some serious updating.

Prices too, have also come down and, in many cases, have come down faster than had been predicted.

Earlier this month, NPD Group estimated that of those U.S. consumers who considered buying a smartphone for \$200 to \$250, 64 percent ended up buying the device for less than \$200, averaging \$135 in the third quarter of 2011.

But prices and adoption rates are only the beginning of these speed-of-light changes.

The amount of mobile Web traffic has surged beyond anyone's wildest expectations.

A study by Chitika found that from July 2011 to until the last week of February 2012, mobile Web traffic surged 35 percent.

It also showed for every hour that mobile users accessed the mobile Web, the amount of time they spent accessing the Web on PCs continued to fall.

The conclusion?

It is Armageddon time: the post-PC and post-feature-phone world is fast approaching.

"Misunderestimating" other things, too: Data gridlock and the tablet flock

Finally, the world's rapid uptake of mobile devices particularly smartphones has led carriers to revamp their data plans long before individual contract renewals.

The Big Three in North America Verizon Wireless, AT&T and T-Mobile all now employ a system called "throttling" where if users are in the upper percentages of data usage, their download speeds will be "throttled back" to help clear congestion on the mobile network.

Think of it like 45 miles per hour speed limits in places on 65mph highways that never had them before.

Of course, slowing down data speeds enough will inspire some would say force customers to spend more money for larger data plans.

For many, their data plans may be still be unlimited, but try driving 65mph in bumper-to-bumper traffic. Not so easy. Who would have thought that in a few short years and to some extent, only within the past year that our digital skies

would become as congested as our roadways?

And if you thought the challenges are smartphone-centric, think again.

While they tend to receive less notoriety, the relatively infant-like tablets only in terms of their age, mind you are rapidly learning how to play the mobile game too.

In Australia, a recent study by Telsyte found that about half of all Australians will be using a tablet by 2016.

Another study by Cisco Systems estimates that by that same year 2016 the number of mobile-Internet-connected devices will reach 10 billion with mobile traffic data of 10.8 exabytes a month, or a billion gigabytes.

Think about that.

In less than 1,500 days, these staggering data usage estimates could be facts or, as has been shown repeatedly in the realm of mobile, low-balling what actually comes to pass.

So where do mobile marketers go from here?

It is clear that mobile is lightning fast minus the throttling and getting cheaper all the time, again minus finicky data plans. It is changing the way we consume media, socialize and, for all intents and purposes, live.

But for all the talk of mobile's march on humanity, how many mobile marketing campaigns have we seen that are truly turning heads and fully capitalizing on these trends?

The answer is not too many.

And marketers, it is not easy.

As evidenced by the rapid changes facing all of us in the digital realm, it would be unfair to throw all marketers under the proverbial bus.

Just think how much a small child grows and matures in those first precious years of life? Mobile, it seems, is not really different. But, like any good parent, it never hurts to offer a few reminders.

Successful marketing campaigns generate conversation, connect people to brands and help them establish an emotional connection. And that is before we even start talking about the monetization.

When compared to with traditional mediums, mobile is uniquely able to integrate multiple types of marketing campaigns including promotional, experiential, sponsorship and others, and do so across multiple platforms.

But in each of those cases, the mobile device is key in linking back to the other outlets.

Learning to crawl versus learning to walk

With three quarters of 2012 remaining, it is very likely that mobile marketers and the rest of us will experience more miracles from smart device.

It is also a forgone conclusion that prices will continue to drop, data networks will continue to fill, and adoption rates will soar.

In these exciting years of rapid mobile device development and industry maturity even if predictions will be difficult mobile marketers would be wise to invest in the time, money and staff requirements necessary to keep pace with our increasingly everywhere and anywhere devices, lifestyles and expectations.

Mobile marketers may be fast crawlers, but like world-exploring youngsters, the difference between infant and toddler is that miraculous moment where a child successfully braces him or herself against a solid object, stands tall, and takes his or her halting first steps.

For mobile marketers, perhaps the remaining months of 2012 will be the needed transition period where an industry finds its stride. And it is about time, too.

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