



PCS, like the HP TouchSmart, are getting smaller, sleeker and cleverer



TECHNOLOGY

The HTC Touch Pro, a PC and mobile phone in the palm of your hand

THE TALE OF TWO SCREENS

The story goes that the humble PC and mobile handsets are fast converging. Careering along in their wake are content producers, application developers, marketers, retailers and business people. We predict the tech trends for 2009

STORY MARY HENDERSON

TECHNOLOGY IN 2009 is the story of two screens. One is a very small screen designed for mobility, and the second is larger but increasingly getting smaller. The measuring stick of status, once dominated by bigger and better, has been turned on its head. Smaller and sleeker now means faster and more powerful.

Let's take a closer look at these two screens. They dominate our lives and are fast converging in capability and performance. The traditional PC and the mobile handset are increasingly becoming single devices acting as organisers, sound systems, games consoles, desktops, communication tools and cameras.

The latest chapter in the book is the iPhone. Heard of it? Hope so! Definitely expect more of the same. A single handset that enables consumers to increasingly be connected while accessing both entertainment and business applications on the fly.

The introduction of new 'no-frills' laptops priced at less than \$500 is another key influence on technology trends in 2009. The first low-spec laptops were released late 2007, and a fleet of affordable machines has emerged with more memory and processing capability.

Smaller, faster, more powerful phones and increasingly affordable PCs are the two technology trends that will dominate your business landscape moving forward. Recognising this, the Australian Government has committed to boosting access to laptops and broadband services across the country. How soon this will be delivered is anybody's guess, but the precedence is in the policy and we can certainly expect a continued increase in access and frequency of use of the internet.

It is easy to be seduced by the rate of change and important to keep in mind that human change is much slower than machines. This gives you the businessperson enormous leverage to move ahead of the times and to strategise your business plans inline with technology trends while leading the market.

FEED THE MOBILE MASSES

According to the International Telecommunications Union there are 3.3 billion mobile phones users in the world. In Australia, there is now more than one mobile service for every Australian, with 21.26 million mobile phone services (Australian Communications and Media Authority, April 2008). Most of the continued growth in the next five years will be in the move from 2G to 3G networks, increasing bandwidth to the average user.

With a focus on the ever-growing techno mobility of our population, feeding the masses should be our primary concern, and the food of choice is content. Current, useful and targeted content should be the focus of every marketer serious about growing their business. Whether it be web content, applications, social networking, embracing SMS and MMS or VOIP, businesses need to be connecting with their growing online and mobile audience.

The advantage of this content is that the brand immersion is significantly more tangible than with traditional mediums such as TV, radio and print. Consumers actively participate in a campaign's

brand and are the primary drivers of the demand rather than the other way round. It is easily measurable and based on the results the content can be redefined and further targeted to the consumers needs. This cycle puts increasing pressure on businesses to have fresh content that is quickly and easily accessible, scaleable and unique.

DEVELOPING UNIQUE EXPERIENCES

Unique experiences will lead the way in successfully harnessing the technologies available. This means working closely with brand experts to deliver content.

By looking at examples of unique experiences that the big brands have been delivering, business leaders can aim to improve

TOP GADGETS IN 2008

2008 was most definitely the year of the iPhone. Apple built the launch anticipation to unseen heights, resulting in a fear mentality that snoozers will miss out, inciting sleepover scenes on the first day of sales.

Whether the iPhone has lived up to the hype depends on who you talk to, but certainly the strong demand and sales figures have been impressive.

Despite some flaws (let's be honest, everyone has an opinion) the iPhone has set a benchmark for converging devices that integrate phones with MP3 players with application platforms.

Another gadget with significant impact in 2008 has been the Blackberry Bold. Traditionally the device of enterprise because of its advanced mobile email capabilities, the Blackberry put the Bold 9000 out there with consumer features that elevate the device to the upper level of smartphones. Available with high speed 3G connectivity, inbuilt GPS, seriously improved MP3 playback functionality, and a greatly improved interface that is both sleek and user-friendly.

their own campaigns. Most leading travel and event booking agencies now offer SMS reminders to customers. A unique experience to take it one step further would be to include a coupon for a discount on items at the candy bar or in-flight service.

Voting via SMS on Australian Idol, Dancing with the Stars and several other high profile entertainment programs is now commonplace. The ultimate in audience participation is the power to influence change.

Unique experiences are not limited to SMS technologies. By enabling a child in a rural area access to an affordable laptop, they can submit their meteorology readings to the Science Today website, in return they receive an honorary weatherman certificate. The engagement builds loyalty and loyalty is the holy grail for advertisers and business marketers alike.

These are all representative of unique experiences that engage consumers in an increasingly targeted fashion. Businesses cannot afford to build a brochure-style website and then simply sit back and expect to attract repeat visitors. For small businesses, access to content might be limited, therefore partnering with likeminded businesses is paramount.

BUILDING CONTENT

The challenge for all businesses then becomes producing content and applications that will engage users in the quickest, most targeted fashion that can be quickly scaled and refreshed. For small businesses, building applications is one option, but a trend that must be followed, is the access and embracing of third party content and applications that are readily available. Building communities of users via hosted forums, or running widgets and applications that generate specialised content are all options that are readily available.

Businesses need to view their technology platform as a portal, which is then fed from various content sources. Making this content visual and interactive is a must. Streaming of video via applications such as YouTube, and incorporating chat rooms, are all relatively cost effective ways of building content.

The BlackBerry Bold is the latest version of this cult business tool



TECH RELEASES FOR 2009

2008 was all about the iPhone, the big conversation amongst techies for 2009 relates to the new Google phones, aimed to launch early next year in Australia. The handset itself is one thing, a combination of iPhone's touchscreen, the BlackBerry trackball and a slide out QWERTY keyboard, but the selling point is the Android operating platform.

Google has developed the open-source platform in conjunction with an alliance of heavyweights in the US. Revealed in New York in September this year, the operating platform will enable all Google applications to run on the phone. In addition, as an open source environment, developers can write their own applications to be accessed via the handsets.

Keep an eye out for the new Blackberry Storm featuring touch screen technology.

Sound familiar?

In line with predictions for continued convergence between the two screens we regularly use, highly portable low cost laptops will continue to progress. Some call them netbooks, some call them mini notebooks, some call them sub laptops. Whatever you want to call them, these highly portable computers are increasing their functionality, decreasing their size and maintaining their low cost positioning.

The rumour is the new ASUS Eee offering due for release early 2009 will feature a touchscreen, Intel Atom dual core processors and is slimmer and sleeker than ever before. In addition, another Eee will be released with less features around the \$300 mark.

You can expect similar advances from the closest contenders, the ACER Inspire One range and the MSI Wind.

poised to launch at Sydney Olympics and eight years later still stuck below the surface.

Yet in Asia, digital commerce is racing ahead of the world. Quite simply, they have the market size to ensure the systems are profitable for vendors while servicing the population. In Australia, the market struggles to leverage this type of technology.

Bluetooth connectivity for marketing is another trend that has slow uptake in Australia compared to the rest of the world. It enables vendors to utilise Bluetooth transmitters to connect with consumers within range. One example is in shopping areas where a shopper might come into range and receives a message about a free donut with any coffee at the eatery. For this type of use, it requires mass to be successful. Perfect in Japan, slow in Australia.

TECHNOLOGY TRENDS AND YOUR CUSTOMER

All of these ideas are innovative, but in terms of ease of use for consumers and maximum market reach, they may not be the best for your customer. As a business, it is imperative to remain competitive and creative with technology that is successful in your marketplace. Make sure you consider this.

For companies like GeekIT Group who are passionate about technologies, new online concepts and applications, these technology trends are at the core of what we do. Your customers should be your focus.

Which brings us back to the time tested marketing phrase 'Know Thy Customer'. Remember that any technology is just a tool and needs to be applied in conjunction with marketing and brand strategy to be truly successful. **DB**

—The quintessential geek in high heels, Mary Henderson is CEO of Geek IT Group (www.geekitgroup.com.au), based in Melbourne.

► The trick with any technology trend, is to apply robust and proven marketing and brand strategy and tactics to its delivery. The technology needs to be low cost to consumers, it needs to be time respectful (i.e. catering for time poor individuals), within the boundaries of laws such as privacy and SPAM, and incentivised. Offering something as simple as a ringtone, a wallpaper download, or a coupon for discount, are all signs of appreciation to the consumer for engaging with your brand via the technology.

WORLDWIDE TRENDS IN 2009

Technology trends mean different things to different people in different cultures. Therefore while considering worldwide trends as important, Australia is a market unto its own. What works in Japan, the US, UK or even New Zealand will not necessarily work here in Australia.

Take the example of mobile commerce in Australia. To cut a long story short, Telstra licensed a platform in 2004 from its Japanese content partner DoCoMo to gain access to its 'digital wallet' technology. The essence is that the phone is equipped as a 'wallet' and enables customers to make contactless payments. The concept was dumped mid 2007. Low subscription and poor vendor support were the reasons.

"TECHNOLOGY TRENDS MEAN DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES. CONSIDER WORLDWIDE TRENDS"

Telstra is again taking the plunge in 2008, currently experimenting with a different technology called NFC, which is more like Bluetooth and users need an NFC-enabled device which would then act as a swipe card. Several other vendors in Australia have also played with the idea of digital commerce and fallen flat. The most well known is ERGs Tcard, a smartcard ticketing system