Chapter 1.15
Mobile Portals

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INTRODUCTION

The diffusion of mobile services is one of important technological phenomena of the twenty-first century (Dholakia & Dholakia, 2003). According to the International Telecommunication Union,[1] the number of mobile service users had exceeded 1.5 billion individual subscribers by early 2005. This represents around one-quarter of the world's population. The introduction of .mobi, a new top-level domain,[2] is expected to further facilitate the usage of mobile services. Because of their high penetration rates, mobile services have received cross-disciplinary academic attention (e.g., Ruhi & Turel, 2005; Serenko & Bontis, 2004; Turel, Serenko & Bontis, 2007; Turel, 2006; Turel & Serenko, 2006; Turel & Yuan, 2006; Turel et al., 2006). While the body of knowledge on mobile services in general is growing (Krogstie, Lyytinen, Opdahl, Pernici, Siau, & Smolander, 2004), there seems to be a gap in our understanding of a basic, yet important service that mobile service providers offer, namely mobile portals (m-portals).

M-portals are wireless Web pages that help wireless users in their interactions with mobile content and services (based on the definition by Clarke & Flaherty, 2003). These are a worthy topic for investigation since, in many cases, they represent the main gate to the mobile Internet and to wireless value-added services (Serenko & Bontis, 2004). Particularly, users of premium wireless services typically employ m-portals to discover and navigate to wireless content such as news briefs, stock quotes, mobile games, and so forth. Given this, m-portals have a strong value proposition (i.e., a unique value-added that an entity offers stakeholders through its operations)

for both users and service providers. These value dimensions, which drive the implementation and the use of m-portals, are explored in the subsequent sections.

Despite that a number of publications solely devoted to the topic of m-portals already exist, there are very few works that not only present the concept of mobile portals, but also portray their characteristics and discuss some of the issues associated with their deployment by service providers and employment by individual users. The value proposition of mobile portals was rarely explored in depth, and some motivational factors for developing and using mobile portals still remain unclear. To fill this gap, this article explores value proposition of mobile portals from both a wireless service provider and an individual user perspective. Based on this discussion, two conceptual frameworks are suggested.

The rest of this article is structured as follows. First, the key value drivers of m-portals from a wireless service provider's viewpoint are portrayed. Second, a framework that depicts the unique attributes of mobile portals and their impact on the value users derive from these services is offered. This framework is then utilized for discussing some of the challenges mobile portal developers and service providers currently face. These obstacles need to be overcome in order for service providers and users to realize the true value of mobile portals.

WHAT ARE MOBILE PORTALS?

As defined earlier, m-portals are wireless Web pages especially designed to ease the navigation and interaction of users with mobile content and services. They are either based on existing Internet resources adjusted to the format of mobile networks or developed from scratch for wireless networks exclusively. Occasionally, m-portals are formed by aggregating several applications together, for example, e-mail, calendars, instant messaging, and content from different information providers in order to combine as much functionality as possible. Usually, mobile portals offer basic information on news, shopping, entertainment, sports, yellow pages, and maps. M-portals can provide access to specific niche content such as health care publications information (Fontelo, Nahin, Liu, Kim, & Ackerman, 2005), public services (Philarou & Lai, 2005), travel services (Koivumäki, 2002), and so forth, or offer general access to the mobile Internet (Jonason & Eliasson, 2001).

Although the field of research pertaining to mobile portals is relatively new, a number of studies have recently investigated the concept of mobile portals from both the technical and system adoption perspectives. From the technical standpoint, scholars have investigated various aspects required for service delivery including the development of the infrastructure required for m-portal services, hypertext languages for wireless content, personalization principles, and device optimization. For example, a context-aware mobile portal was developed (Mandato, Kovacs, Hohl, & Amir-Alikhani, 2002). It automatically adapts to user needs based on explicit preferences and implicit information derived from the content viewed by individuals and is achieved through the incorporation of leading-edge technologies and principles. This allows users to receive customized portal services in real-time at no cost. The usage of mobile agents was also offered as a solution to develop a personalization mechanism that considers both user and device profiles (Samaras & Panayiotou, 2002). From the technology adoption perspective, most scholars are concerned with the acceptance of wireless portals by individuals and organizations. For instance, a conceptual model of m-portal adoption was offered (Serenko & Bontis, 2004) and the role of marketing in the promotion of wireless portals was studied (Blechar, Constantiou, & Damsgaard, 2005).

Despite the differences in research directions, all academics agree that having mobile portals