

The way to customers' hearts is through their phones

 By [Vanessa Clark](#)

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Never before have people had such a love affair with a communications medium as they have with their mobile phones. Now, marketers aren't communicating with consumers via an impersonal one-way device; rather, they are communicating with them through a device people happily carry around 24/7. Here are my top 12 trends for the mobile world in 2012.



1. The battle for customers goes mobile

The battle for ultimate access to the end-user is going to be slugged out in the mobile space, and this year it looks like the top contenders are the mobile operators, the handset manufacturers and FNB. There's no real sign of retailers or content producers entering the fray as yet.

Late entrants will be caught short when they realise the role mobile phones will play in allowing people to pay for goods and services.

2. Mobile fragmentation is here to stay

Feature phones vs smartphones vs tablets; Apple vs Android vs BlackBerry; native applications vs HTML5 - if anything, mobile fragmentation is going to increase over the course of 2012.

Companies will need to start looking past the hype, understand which devices their customers are using for which purpose, and then be incredibly savvy about how they roll out mobile services.

A corollary of this is that customers are going to start choosing mobile devices based on what they want to do with them, rather than other imperatives.

3. Location, location, location

Location-based services are going to become far more mainstream in 2012, similar to how Twitter crossed over last year. This will be helped by forward-thinking brands realising the power of speaking to people according to where they are currently located.

And this, I suspect, is where the issue of privacy is going to come to a head, with consumers being more mindful of the information they share, and brands and companies needing to respect privacy preferences or destroying their relationship with the customer.

4. Mobile safety and security become a priority for users

Safety and security mechanisms tend to lag fast-paced technology changes, but 2012 is the year when individuals, parents and companies are going to have to sit up and take notice of the potential safety and security risks their mobile device opens them up to, and start doing something about them.

5. People start clawing back some control over their mobile devices

Walking around with an always-on digital communications device has heaps of benefits. Take a look at the massive growth of mobile uptake and mobile data use: people like being connected and having the convenience of all the

clever applications out there.

But we might also have spawned a monster and have become slaves to the blinking light and incoming alert notification. This year people start claiming back control over the mobile information flooding into their lives.

6. Education goes mobile

Unfortunately, it's going to take a bit longer than just this year, but mobile devices are going to revolutionise education and become a staple in most classrooms and university lecture theatres.

The potential is mind-boggling, from accessing world-class thinkers, to sharing local research, to collaborating with students around the world.

7. Google rules supreme

The holy trinity of Google, Google+ and Android has the potential to be the most disruptive influence in the mobile social space, perhaps even toppling Facebook - which is also fast becoming a mobile company - from its throne.

Google took the first step in this direction at the start of the year by integrating Google+ into its search results.

8. One device to rule them all

If you think you can't live without your smartphone today, wait until it starts talking to all the other devices you own.

This year we're going to see smartphones starting to integrate with and control all the other electronic equipment in your life, from kettles and toasters, to hot water geysers, to home security, to cars - to pretty much anything with an on-off switch.

9. Employers to embrace the consumerisation of IT

Employers have to work out a way to manage the mobile devices both entering the workplace and accessing corporate networks. BYOD - or bring your own device - is fast becoming the norm, and this is changing the relationship employees have with their IT equipment.

A top-down approach, where an employee is handed a laptop and a cellphone and asked to sign up to the company's terms and conditions, is no longer going to work.

10. Enterprise mobile apps to come into their own

Forward-thinking companies are going to realise that they can learn a lot from how their employees are using their mobile devices for productivity, communication, entertainment and gaming.

This is going to stimulate a vibrant enterprise application environment, changing the way businesses operate forever.

11. Mobile data use is going to skyrocket

Already, Vodacom has reported that smartphone data use is growing at a far faster trajectory than that of 3G dongles. We've already seen mobile data prices fall dramatically in 2011, and this trend should continue into 2012.

12. Mobile cloud

With mobile data becoming more affordable and faster, accessing cloud services over a mobile device is going to

become increasingly feasible, further extending the capabilities of an already very smart device.

In Africa, specifically, this is going to be a game changer, with the mobile-only generation having access to cloud services previously only available over fixed lines.

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ABOUT VANESSA CLARK

Hi! I'm a freelance journalist, copywriter and editor based in Cape Town, South Africa. I write as a journalist and for corporates and agencies. My specialties are business-to-business and technology writing. I like unpacking complex ideas so they are more easily understood - especially when it involves innovation taking place in South Africa, and the rest of Africa.

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