

THE SMARTS AND THE APPS

EDWARD CONMY looks at the response to the iPhone from manufactures, operators and developers. There are over 300,000 iPhones in the Irish market and that number will continue to grow. There are, however, 5,302,345 mobile subscriptions at the end of Q4 2009. Many of these are smart devices and the sector is growing rapidly, dwarfing the Apple figure.



Edward Conmy

Shane O'Brien, software and services manger with Nokia Ireland notes "we have thousands of smart phones currently in the Irish market and millions European wide." With this in mind I sat down with a number of players over the last couple of weeks to get their take on the future of smart phones, to bring us through some of the challenges and also the best bits.

NETWORK VIEW

"The big big change is that customers have begun to use their phone in ways they never imagined. The latest smartphones make it so easy to start using Facebook, Twitter, Gmail, etc. And once you start, there's no going back," says Kealan O'Donoghue, head of devices with Meteor.



DEVELOPER VIEW

DV4 is a video production and coding company that recently went into application development. I caught up with Liam Ward and asked him a few cross platform questions.

DT: What prompted you to get into app development?

LW: We've had a concept for a music app that creates a direct link between artists and fans for five years. We initially developed it on platforms like Symbian, J2ME and Streamezzo but the hurdles to deployment were always too big. Apple finally provided a way to distribute apps and we have launched with two acts - Hoarsebox and John McIvor - and more to follow. The John McIvor one was in the top 100 iPhones apps in China.

DT: On the business side?

LW: We are now developing an app for a corporate client and we see

the key challenges at the moment being to reduce the development cost and deploy to platforms other than iPhone. This next one is working on Android and once our iPad is delivered we'll try to get it working on that too. The recent emergence of Samsung's Bada and Microsoft's Windows Phone 7 platforms presents a problem for app developers and their customers. It's not going to be cost-effective to deploy an app that hits all those platforms.

DT: What platform's are you experimenting with and why?

LW: On mobile, currently, iPhone, iPad and Android, and investigating Bada and Windows Phone 7. We have also been watching connected TV developments like Boxee and Apple TV for a long time. The recent announcement of the Google TV platform is significant because they have partnered with Sony and Intel and because it is Android-based. So, much the same way that iPhone apps can be translated to iPad, we can expect Android apps to translate to the Google TV platform.



On the business side, Gary Disley, head of business marketing in O2 Ireland states, “Users use smartphones to manage their day-to-day activities, This continues to blur the lines between the traditional ‘working hours’ and the hours that people are actually working.”

DEVICES

If you are a mobile device manufacturer you need to focus on smartphones. They increase average revenue per user and they create stickiness and help customer retention. Key to this are the local apps and big international apps available for free in the app stores. With their international reach Samsung, Nokia and Sony Ericsson can count on the international development community to deliver the later. For the local development side of things all are spending time and money engaging with the local developer community to address developer concerns. HTC is also present in Ireland and is hoping the scale delivered by Android (the platform emerging as the natural cross-manufacturer choice) and local development will deliver the same results. All of this is good news for business users as the technology improves and real choice becomes available.

BADA BING

The single biggest issue for manufactures, and by extension developers and end users, is the multitude of development platforms. What does this mean? Any app needs to be developed to a standard and uploaded to a store. This is done through platforms. And there are loads of them. This is the biggest challenge for developers and an issue platform owners are constantly improving. Different platforms mean delivering market scale is very difficult. Here are some of the best known:

Manufacturer	Platform
Microsoft	Microsoft mobile/Phone 7 & Android
Samsung	Bada & Android
Google/ Nexus	Android
Sony Ericsson	Symbian & Android
Nokia	Symbian
HTC	Android

UTILITY FOR ALL

The massive pre-pay, or pay as you go, market is now getting its hands on some nice entry devices. Gary Twohig, general manager of Smasung Ireland spoke to us about the Wave HD. “The first of many devices to support entry into the pre-pay market.” With the introduction of Meteor’s new free internet prepay plan customers can get the best out of these devices without the pain of data cost. Kealan O’Donoghue of Meteor also states “Devices such as the HTC Wildfire, Sony Ericsson X10 Mini and the LG Swift are amongst the list of exciting new affordable smart phones on the way.”

ARE YOU JUST PLEASED TO SEE ME?

We asked some of the industry players what they are carrying in their pocket and their favourite apps:

Shane O’Brien – Nokia X6 16GB. Best bits – OVI maps and currently the Ash Cloud app to help with business travel.

Gary Twohig – Samsung Galaxy S. Best bits – It will be released in July and is the heavy weight offering, going up directly against you know who.

Kealan O’Donoghue – HTC Desire. Best bits – Definitely Layar, augmented reality map, just point at an area and find out what you need. Bar with the world cup on? No problem.

Russell Keating – Sony Ericsson Xperia X10. Best bits – Google maps running on Android. Street level view, turn by turn navigation and it’s free!