



EuroNews on mobiles

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When EuroNews was broadcast for the first time in 1993, mobile phones were black, clumsy bricks.

They had batteries that ran out very quickly, were hardly usable due to poor network coverage and were mainly, let's face it, to show off.

Who would have thought that one day we would be watching Live TV and 'mobisodes' on these devices? However, with 12 years hindsight, one is tempted to think that EuroNews was already set up to be the first mobile-adapted television service. If you were really wanted to have a dedicated live mobile channel today, chances are that it would look a lot like Europe's leading news channel. What led us to this perhaps surprising conclusion is what we have experienced so far since the launch of EuroNews's Live TV service in 2004.

Watching television on mobiles is different from watching it at home. Strangely enough, however, watching television on a mobile nevertheless has many similarities with watching television at home. Experiences so far show that users expect to find well-known brands or at least well-known faces on their mobile phones. They do not (yet?) see the handset as a new medium but just another screen.

A good example to prove this is the fact that operators haven't received complaints about TV advertising on



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mobile signals as one would expect, especially when clients pay per minute. Getting billed for watching TV ads? No, the mobile phone user seems to expect that the TV on his mobile is the TV he knows from his living room, and if there is advertising, well, so be it.

But viewers do not consume mobile TV as at home, nor at exactly the same time. EuroNews took part in the DVB-H trial in Helsinki earlier this year, and from this test and from the results of our services which have already been launched around Europe we have learned something interesting about user behaviour.

Snacking

First of all, there is the phenomenon of 'snacking': users often tune in for a very short period of time, mostly just a couple of minutes. When choosing EuroNews, they are very likely to find a complete news item in that period. Stories are quite short (one or two minutes on average) and longer formats do not feature too often.

Linked to this is the 'news' aspect. There is always something going on somewhere in the world, and the mobile phone user can expect to get something new every time she checks the EuroNews channel: our news bulletins are on the hour and the half-hour, updated 24 hours per day. When asked which programmes are most suited to distribution via mobile phones, a large majority of users vote for news.

But not all news is created equal. As we broadcast simultaneously in seven languages, EuroNews' founding fathers decided to use a new approach and reject the use of on-air presenters. Today EuroNews continues to stick to its all-image format with no talking heads.

What some perceive as a disadvantage – the lack of anchormen and



anchorwomen who give a 'face' to a channel – is without doubt an advantage in the mobile world. When you have an all-image format, you need clear graphics to separate stories. Therefore we use large on-air graphics to identify our news items and those graphics translate extremely well into the mobile world. Our different bulletins and magazines are all introduced with big, colourful opening sequences, which make it very easy for the user to actually read the texts, even on a mobile screen.

Blurs in distinction

The second interesting aspect of user behaviour came up when we looked at when users are actually watching mobile TV. Killing time ('snacking' again) and keeping up to date was expected to be the main reasons why users tuned in, but it turned out that some find it very difficult to separate themselves from their mobile phone. Statistics show that it is not uncommon for users to watch mobile TV...at home and in the early and late evening. Research from Scandinavia shows that quite a number even take it to bed with them. Another reason to think that users regard mobile TV really as TV, as a second TV perhaps, even though they use it differently.

But alas, though users might think like this, it is not automatically the case for image rightsholders. We have seen a tendency in the market for mobile operators to try to distinguish themselves from their competitors by acquiring exclusive mobile rights – nice for marketing reasons, a nightmare for broadcasters. Fair enough, rightsholders want their share of the revenue but it remains to be seen if regarding mobile TV as another medium compared with 'traditional' TV can stand the test of time. EuroNews, like public broadcasters, takes the view that the future should allow a complete, simultaneous and unchanged transmission of TV broadcasts, whatever the device.

Rights and exclusivity

In practice these rights and exclusivity issues have created strange results: broadcasters are forced to blackout parts of their mobile TV service. Others, for example in Norway, display images of a fish tank during these periods. EuroNews faced the same problems and we therefore decided to take a giant leap forward and create a dedicated feed for mobile phones. Available now on SESAT, we use this signal for all our mobile services around Europe. Elements for which we could not acquire the mobile rights are replaced with results tables or other EuroNews programmes. The viewing experience stays the same.

Viewing experience is a keyword. The mobile TV of the (very near?) future will probably develop a different image grammar from today's TV. More close-ups, shorter sequences, no wide-screen shots of landscapes – this is what the so-called 'mobisodes' already show today in Asia and some European countries. EuroNews has looked into the idea of creating content especially for mobile phones, for example a mobile bulletin respecting those potential guidelines. We have outlined such a service but, even though handset sales of 3G phones are going up worldwide, we think that the critical mass for such a EuroNews product has not yet been reached. Furthermore, this will probably also require some changes

higher in the production chain, starting with the cameramen on the ground.

Nine networks

Today EuroNews has launched its mobile Live TV services on nine networks in Austria (Mobilkom, Hutchison 3 Austria), Belgium (Proximus), France (SFR, Orange), Portugal (Vodafone, Optimus), Spain (Amena) and Switzerland (Orange). Additionally, we offer video-on-demand services on i-mode and WAP-portals around Europe. Hardly anybody could possibly have predicted this 10 years ago, and nobody knows where it will lead us in the next 10 years. Will the 3G networks support the rising data traffic, will cable and satellite operators place their brand on mobile platforms, will DVB-H networks be built all over Europe and reduce mobile operators more or less to bit pipes, or on the contrary will operators keep the business in-house thanks to the multicasting technology of MBMS? As it is the case with IPTV, mobile television seems to be the new frontier where new or niche operators pass in front of established 'traditional' broadcasters.

Thanks to decisions taken in the last century, thanks to a unique point of view and thanks to its seven languages, EuroNews has all it takes to play an important role in that field in the years to come.

