

# Mobile - the technology tsunami



ByLexFaure

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No other development in the history of the world has caused so much change, in such a short time period, as the explosive growth of the mobile phone in general, and the smart phone in particular.

There are reportedly about 6 billion cell phones littering our planet. Taking into account the pre-technology aged, the impoverished, the lost tribes of the Amazon and those lucky babes in arms who have not yet succumbed to the slavery of connectivity - where are all these phones hiding? It would seem to me from the statistics that every drawer in the homes of the "developed" nations must be buzzing and vibrating with the syncopated chorus of inane ringtones and assorted bizarre sounds used to alert the jaded consumer that his or her shiny ringmaster is calling for attention.

We are used to concerned parents wailing about their children's inability to communicate verbally - whilst they themselves are tied to their BB or iPhone or whatever device is fashionable in their social network.

## Swan dive

The humble portable phone, which is how the mobile phone started its life, was just that. A phone which did not need a fixed line to operate. And this was revolutionary and exciting, if a little big and clunky. Well the brick soon transformed into a swan - except that, instead of growing UP into a swan, it grew DOWN into a smaller, lighter, thinner super computer. The current smartphone boasts quad core processors, 1Gb RAM, 1Ghz processor speeds and includes more gadgets and gizmos than most people's desktop computers. Even the technological wizardry was not enough for the manufacturers with mobile phones and cameras merging into the same space - and Nokia upped the ante by cramming a 41 megapixel giant killer into their 808 PureView smartphone. Where does this end?

The Nokia 808 is not really a game changer though, I think it is too extreme and too specialised, since the ubiquitous 8Mp camera as found in the Samsung Galaxy SIII, the latest iPhone and most top end smartphones seems to have become the norm, at least for the time being. Nokia has always tended to seek the top end with regard to phone cameras, largely due to their 7 year partnership with Carl Zeiss, who provide the camera technology. The camera innovations are seen by many as a desperate attempt to keep market share and retain credibility in a market which is moving away from the struggling Finish manufacturer. Although an interesting point worth thinking about is that the Nokia 1100 is the most popular phone in the world - and especially in developing countries, because it is cheap, rugged, dust proof, water resistant, has few spare parts and includes a built-in flash light! It is also easy to repair.

## Where to from here?

Where does mobile go from here? It has pushed the boundaries in development terms and has long since exceeded the needs and abilities of most of its users. So where to now?

Obviously there is no simple answer, since we are talking about a product that is used by virtually the entire population of the world. Needs and expectations vary according to the markets the phones are used in. But the primary focus areas for mobile phones are the following:

*Feature phones:* 70% of phones sold world-wide are feature phones: Making calls and SMS's are primary needs for the majority of users. For them the mobile phone is a means of communication with the added bonus for some that it can also be used to connect to the Internet. Banking services for the unbanked, such as M-PESA have revolutionised the way people can send and receive money. In developing countries such as China and India, feature phone growth will still be massive for many years to come. Quad core high performance phones become irrelevant, for most users, in such a market.

*Gaming:* Then there is the youth and gaming market - their needs are much more specialised and require high performance and extreme technology. Here even a quad core is too slow!

*Music:* There is a major need for phones which can play music, with large storage space - and these phones largely replace MP3 and other music players.

*Camera replacements:* For many users, their smartphone also replaces a camera - and for these users smart phones are their phones of choice.

*Business:* The business user has specific needs. In South Africa, the BlackBerry rules supreme, although the iPhone and Android phones feature strongly. These phones need Exchange Server connectivity, email push, easy texting and email editing and the ability to run videos and show pictures. Most smartphones fit into this category.

*Youth Market:* Where youth can afford it, BBM is the communication method of choice, although MXit is almost universal amongst the youth. Messaging, music, pictures, YouTube and Facebook are the features most sought after. Phones are also seen as fashion accessories, so young people are very brand and model conscious.

Finally we have the *techno-geeks* - and they just want the best gizmos and gadgets on the market. They will never be satisfied with anything the manufacturers produce!

The current mobile market is ultra-competitive, changing all the time and difficult to define. But one thing is clear, the mobile phone will be part of our lives for the foreseeable future, and it is rapidly becoming the alternative to a desktop computer for many users. For businesses the message is simple - ignore the mobile market and you are likely to become part of history, not part of the future.

## ABOUT LEX FAURE

Internet Guru at Carpe Diem Productions. Passionate about technology and the Internet. Also have a great love for film and enjoy watching the classics and interesting films. Follow @goMbbiSA on Twitter.  
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