engaging consumers with VAS & premium content that pays

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WORLD TELEMEDIA MARBELLA

World Telemedia Marbella – five key learnings for the industry

What were the hot buttons at this year's World Telemedia Show in Marbella across VAS, DCB, content, cyber security, marketing, fraud and more?

World Telemedia fills that gap in the mobile/digital world that no one else does. Hall 8.1 at Mobile World Congress attempts to do it, while a host of other events cover elements of the complex value chain of customer acquisition, monetisation and protection around digital services. However, World Telemedia is the only place where they can all get together and not only discuss the issues driving the value chain, but also – and more importantly – do the deals that make it all happen.

So what – in no particular order of importance – were the hottest topics at the show?

CARRIER BILLING

Carrier billing is suddenly a hot topic. For small proportion of delegates that have been to World Telemedia for the past 29 years like I have, that raises a wry smile – but sure enough, carrier billing is taking some serious market share.

Outside the UK, carrier billing is on the up as across Europe PSD2 has seen it start

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WORLD TELEMEDIA MARBELLA

WTM18 More international and bigger than ever

This year's World Telemedia Marbella was a massive success – showcasing how the industry is finding new markets and embracing new technology.

While this issue of Telemedia magazine digs into the news, views, stories and trends from this year's World Telemedia is Marbella, here is a snap shot of the delegates that were at the show. Looking forward already to WTM19 on 7-9 October in Marbella.

528 Total Delegates	**53** Individual Countries (+19%)
• +18% (+56% on 2016)	• **47%** Europe (-8%)
• 2019 forecast 580+	• **23%** UK (-4%)
• 91% C-Level executives	• **11%** Middle East (+4%)
	• **9%** S/N America *(+3%)
301 Total Companies (+27%)	• **7%** Australasia (+12%)
123 New Companies* (+51%)	• **3%** Africa (+2%)

Percentage change (+/-) from World Telemedia 2017

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25 YEARS

"The farther back you can look, the farther forward you are likely to see!"

Churchill

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WTM18 Hot buttons

<< 1

to be used for interesting things like ticket purchases, parking and subscriptions to things like Spotify, Netflix and Microsoft games and software.

CRYPTO AND BLOCKCHAIN

Building on the payments theme, there were several sessions looking at crypto currencies and blockchain. The importance of these two 'new' technologies to Telemedia and the VAS ecosystem can't be stressed enough.

Coins in games are already being traded for money – going gamers dedicating hours to earning coins for other people or selling them on for cash – is now a reality. Soon, it will start to move out into the world of loyalty points and so on.

VAS providers need to be ready – they need to start to think about how they take 'payments' in cryptocurrencies – not just Bitcoin, but pretty much anything of value – and how to take money out the other end.

AFFILIATE MARKETING

Affiliate marketing continues to drive vast amounts of traffic for VAS and premium rate and carrier billing is increasingly being seen as the last part of the process where affiliates can monetise rapidly.

But much of the debate around affiliate marketing centred squarely on fraud. The sector has been troubled by fraud for some time, but the fight back has been swift. Many affiliates have disappeared and the networks that are left are largely reputable, large, tech-driven operations that have invested heavily in AI to fight fraud.

MESSAGING

Messaging has always played a key role in Telemedia, with PSMS having rebuilt the industry in the late 90s and early 2000s when the mobile explosion happened. Now OTT messaging is rife among users and looking to monetise interaction through services such as WhatsApp, WeChat, Viber and more is an ongoing debate.

Of course, SMS is still very much in the running – and isn't going anywhere anytime soon. It is so ubiquitous that all messaging services coming down the pipe tend to default to SMS at some point when networks are flaky. And users still use SMS in increasing numbers.

Why, then, do we need a more advanced form of messaging such as Google's Rich Communications Service (RCS)? A good question and one that seems to be being answered by the market. Of the 800-odd MNOs around the world, 55 have pledged support for RCS, according to data from Mobile Squared.

INTERACTIVE MEDIA

The rise of PSMS back in the day was largely driven by its use to interact with TV shows in the early part of the 21st Century and that world of interactive media is still very part of VAS ecosystem and a core area for Telemedia deployment.

Interestingly, where once the mobile was seen as the 'second screen' behind TV, these days many content providers see it as the other way round. There is a proliferation of content that is in all but name TV content on the web and these days TV brands are just as likely to be online, on apps and on the box as they were to be just on TV.

Carrier billing: jam tomorrow?

Carrier billing is slowly starting to get noticed as PSD2 opens up where it can be used. But its time is still yet to come. **Paul Skeldon** looks at where it is today, where it is going and how long that might take

Carrier billing has long been used along the periphery of the telecoms industry, carving out a niche for itself around gaming and other content services. The rise of interest in mobile payments in the past decade should have propelled it to even greater use, only it didn't.

In the UK, there has been a whiff of controversy around carrier billing – tainted largely by scams that occurred with some of the services where it was used – and this has held back its deployment.

Elsewhere, carrier billing has seen more success, but again thanks to lack of any meaningful education by operators, it hasn't ever really exploded.

But times have changed. A new generation of users are now looking again at the convenience of simply clicking and paying – from their credit or in their bill – and, as consumers become ever-more demanding of instant gratification, carrier billing is starting to be looked at anew.

In 2018, the global market for carrier billing is estimated to be worth around US$13.9billion. By 2022 this is going to top US$31billion, according to figures from Mobilesquared – showing just how people around the world are embracing this payment tool.

WHAT IS DRIVING DCB?

"A lot of this growth is coming from Asia," explains Nick Lane, principle analyst at Mobilesquared. "Google is already adding about US$2.5 to US$3 billion a year to DCB [direct carrier billing] traffic too and we also need to factor in Amazon, which is already using DCB in Japan and which is likely to add US$10billion to DCB by 2022 and beyond."

In Asia the growth of mcommerce using DCB is adding large amounts of traffic, but in Europe, there are a crop of new services that tap into millennial users that are also adding DCB traffic to the mix.

Currently in the UK, DCB is worth some £253million, but is set to grow to £580million by 2020, says Lane, driven by services such as ebooks, health services, gym payments and subscriptions. "These alone will account for 27% of the UK DCB market by 2020," says Lane.

Affiliate marketing and VAS are also playing their part too.

"Growing use of affiliate marketing to push VAS will start to create an interesting and sustainable DCB eco-system," says Lane.

The entire global VAS market is worth anything up to US$600billion a year and even if DCB takes a tiny slice of this it will be extremely lucrative.

And this is the principle consideration with carrier billing: it isn't going to dominate any market, but it is going to be one of the payment tools available and it will generate some money. It is the agglomeration of these slices of other markets where the revenues from DCB lie.

WHAT HOLDS IT BACK

However, it isn't all plain sailing. The biggest bugbear with DCB is that revenue shares between merchants and services providers and MNOs are still not favourable. Currently, operators are typically keeping between 8 and 12% of revenues, which is too high. Credit card and other payment tools are typically around 3-5%. "Getting it to 5% would be acceptable," says Lane, making it more attractive to more merchants.

"There is also the issue of time to market," says Lane. "It can take anything from several weeks to a number of months from initial discussions to actually getting a DCB service up and running across a network – that compares poorly to PayPal, which can usually be set up in a matter of minutes. Hours at most."

This does put merchants off and, while DCB isn't there to compete per se with other payment tools, many aren't bothering to add it to the mix simply because it takes too long.

There is also the issue that the market simply isn't educated about carrier billing. Many consumers and merchants remain largely unaware of the benefits of DCB and this lack of perceived interest feeds into operator reluctance to improve revenue shares and speed up onboarding.

However, as it does slowly start to offer ease-of-use gains to some consumers, it will start to see more use. It's been a slow burn – we can wait.

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THE POWER OF PAYMENT !

Carrier Billing: Opportunity knocks

Carrier billing is starting to make inroads into the mainstream consciousness around the world , so what sorts of services are going to propel it in 2019 in Europe? Paul Skeldon reports

"We talk a lot about 'the industry, what we don't do very well is talk about the customers and who it's for." Rob Weisz, CEO, Fonix kicked off World Telemedia Marbella's DCB focus this year with a rallying call – "We all know how good DCB is, our challenge is change its image and make it a real part of alternative payments," he said. Weisz is right. DCB has huge potential (see page 4), but is held back by a simple lack of publicity and market education.

So what are the opportunities?

Looking at the UK market, there is a growing number of places that DCB is coming to the fore. And Weisz is keen to push all of them.

GAMING

DCB is making quite a mark on gaming. It is being used predominantly as an onboarding tool, with a view to upgrade users to card payments as they get more serious, but it can't be overlooked as a great way to generate DCB traffic.

It is also being touted as a great way to deposit funds and simply as just another payment choice for gamers and gamblers. The more options the to pay, the more likely potential customers are to join in.

In the non-gambling gaming world DCB is an ideal way for the unbanked – that's youngsters – to buy weapons and other game paraphernalia using their phones.

The argument against DCB use in gaming and gambling always circles back to outpayments, but this is an outmoded and easily defeated criticism, says Weisz. "Outpayments may appear 'poor' but carrier billing is seeing 30% increases in on-boarding, which is worth paying 12% for surely?" he says.

TICKETING

The Holy Grail of PSD2 has been to get digital ticketing using DCB working, making a virtuous circle of the mobile add, mobile payment, mobile ticket. This is already starting to see some traction with Fonix powering theatre tickets and Cowes Ferry with DCB-based mobile ticketing.

In Germany, bus company Flixbus is also rolling out mobile ticketing for its pan-European buses using DCB, with great effect.

CHARITY

Charity donation using PSMS and now carrier billing have long been a success and have been used to pioneer DCB as a mass-market payment tool. But, while many see it as a loss-leader, really it is actually a lucrative operation as charities do pay for donations – don't think that credit card companies don't charge the 3% to charities. The same can apply to DCB based charity donations.

And it is quite a market: £37billion of the total £77billion donated last year to charity in the UK was on mobile.

WHERE NEXT?

While these are established ways to roll out DCB, there is a growing move to use them for subscriptions. Until recently, subs services were a dirty word, but millennials love a subscription: Netflix, Office 365 and more. DCB is an ideal tool for quick and easy on-boarding for sub services of everything from music to books to lifestyle apps to dating.

Similarly, media companies are turning to one off DCB payments and subs to monetise digital content. People aren't necessarily against paying 20p to read a news story or watch a video, but unless the payment mechanism is instant and doesn't get in the way, they won't stop and pay.

Carrier billing allows for this to be done quickly and easily and so is likely to be one of the big successes for DCB in the coming years.

The peculiarities of OTT delivery and the perils of taking an Upside Down approach

Chris Wood explains how to create an OTT infrastructure that provides effective direct-to-consumer capabilities and prevents strange things ruining the user experience.

Spoiler alert! In the cult Netflix series, Stranger Things, Jim Hopper's decision to take the direct approach to solving Hawkins' mysteries sees him swallowed up by a network of vines in the 'Upside Down'. Oblivious to the dangers that lurked beneath, he almost pays a heavy price.

It's a similar plotline for service providers and brands, whose efforts to establish direct-to-consumer capabilities typically rush to the endgame of the delivery network – only to get entangled in the reeds of technical challenges that should have been addressed earlier in the process. It's a costly, Upside Down approach. Because if, like Jim Hopper, you don't get the groundwork right, stranger things happen that can ruin the user experience and cost you viewers. That's the ultimate spoiler. But it can easily be avoided.

THE DEMOGORGON OF DIRECT DELIVERY

Building the optimal platform to deliver Over-the-Top (OTT) content direct to the consumer isn't easy. But, as the appetite for on-demand streaming increases, making the transition has become a high priority. Stirred by the growth of cloud-based disruptors like Netflix and Amazon, traditional broadcasters are launching their own direct-to-consumer platforms while niche channels and service providers are gearing up to join them. The problem is the move from traditional to IT-based infrastructure is a journey to a parallel dimension where stranger things happen. OTT delivery takes operators out of their comfort zones and requires them to acquire unfamiliar skillsets to create a seamless experience.

Delivering video content over the internet is fraught with peril that ultimately manifests itself in the customer experience. Viewers expect a great user interface, a stable experience and the ability to watch what they want whenever they want it, on any device. To be commercially successful, providers need to deliver high-quality streams on a global scale, where every region – and every device – presents its own peculiarities. There's an awful lot to get right. What's more, with audiences fickle and unforgiving, you need to get it all right, at speed. Time lags or choppy video is a recipe for disengagement. Falling short of customer expectations is like being savaged by a Demogorgon: your brand may never come back. Chances are, your viewers won't return either.

User experience is everything. But to achieve it, you must start in the right place. Many service providers mistakenly believe that the Content Delivery Network (CDN) is the engine room of user experience, and so they narrowly focus their attentions there. It's an upside-down approach that poses significant risks to the brand experience. There's more to delivery than designing an app and configuring the CDN. The drivers of user experience are determined far earlier in a complex process that bridges multiple players, locations and viewer-specific variables. It's a monster. But it can be tamed.

TAMING THE MONSTER

There are four core areas that must all be optimised to deliver video, at scale, directly to the consumer.

#1: Platform architecture – OTT infrastructure is multi-faceted and involves multiple vendors, skillsets and technologies that all add value across the delivery chain. With so many actors in the process, it's important to map everything out up front. Often, however, service providers don't 'own' the process but instead take best practice from all their vendors and hope everything comes together in the end. Unfortunately, it rarely does. Poorly conceived, piecemeal planning generally leads to suboptimal architecture and inefficiencies that reveal themselves in the user experience. These inefficiencies are magnified when providers try to scale delivery to mass audiences across multiple countries.

A good plan will set out the vision and map the vendors and technologies required to establish the optimal architecture. Best led by a technical architect, it will outline how all the components inter-relate and provide a foundation for the processes needed to (quite literally) deliver the vision. The roadmap doesn't need to be set in stone, but it does need to be in place from the beginning. The best plans are proactive, adaptive and iterative – but they're all anchored to a defined vision.

#2: Media preparation – This is central to the user experience. Building on the roadmap, media preparation is about understanding and optimising the various technical components required to deliver high-quality video at scale. In a complex world with no single encoding standard, preparing content for delivery requires a granular understanding of a range of variables; devices, screen sizes, bitrates, frame rates, sequencing and configuration. It's highly technical and often goes beyond the skillsets of a technical architect. It requires the input of a true video expert. The slightest misalignment will inevitably lead to poor quality streams and suboptimal user experience.

#3: Apps and Control Planes – The foundation for building effective applications is, once again, enshrined in the roadmap. Unfortunately, applications are often designed by great software developers who are, sadly, unfamiliar with the peculiarities of video delivery and the idiosyncrasies in how users browse and view content. Simple things like the order in which components load in an app can massively impact the speed of delivery. The development of intelligent rules around aspects like pre-buffering or pre-caching content can help create a smoother experience. Conversely, when apps aren't optimised for the way your services work, it can kill the experience altogether.

Control Planes also dictate the quality of the user experience. The Control Plane sits in the background, discretely validating user entitlements, authorisation, location and licensing rights to make the app work quickly and effectively. However, a poorly configured Control Plane can be the Shadow Monster of video delivery – significantly delaying or interrupting the user experience. For example, if 100,000 people hit the same server at the same time – and, each time, the system must go through a convoluted series of steps before serving content – the experience will lag and the viewer will become frustrated. That spinning wheel on the player at the time of playback isn't only as a result of CDN interaction. Once again, configuring the platform to avoid delay requires specific know-how and expertise.

#4: Media delivery and playback – Our golden egg – this represents the delivery of the product to the consumer – but it's still so easy to get wrong. It's frequently assumed that the CDN is the only actor in the delivery phase and that delays in playback are entirely the CDN's fault. However, as outlined above, there are numerous steps in between that can cause delay and ruin the experience. It's important to remember that a CDN can only start playing video once it's had a request to do so. If that request takes too long, it's commonly down to misaligned processes or suboptimal sequencing earlier in the delivery chain.

The CDN is the endgame of video delivery and a crucial determinant of user experience. However, whilst its configuration undoubtedly needs optimising, it shouldn't be your first area of focus. Taking an upside-down approach to designing OTT infrastructure will invariably mean you overlook common drivers of inefficiency – triggering user experiences that are spoilt by stranger things. To avoid them, it pays to partner with experts who know how to build successful video services in the Cloud and can help you journey to a parallel dimension. What's more, unlike Jim Hopper, they'll do all the groundwork and won't leave you trapped in the reeds.

RCS: the new face of messaging… …or too little too late?

Photo: Shutterstock.com

SMS is the unlikely runaway success of mobile – so why isn't SMS2.0 (or Google's RCS, to give it its proper name) getting anywhere? Here **Paul Skeldon** takes a look at what RCS has achieved and what needs to happen to push it onwards

Text messaging has been with us for more than 20 years and in that time it has gone from being a tool for engineers to talk to each other to a vital part of the comms mix for all individuals and business worldwide.

And in those 20 years not much has changed. It is cross network, simple and works really well.

However, SMS 2.0 is with us and, given the ubiquity of SMS, you'd think businesses and consumers would be biting off operators' hands to use it. But so far it has seen only limited uptake and ask anyone in the

Some RCS successes

While RCS may be experiencing mixed fortunes, there are some areas where it is starting to gain some traction. With many operators in the US, South America and Indonesia offering it, there are some cool services that show just what it can be used for. Maybe the rest of the world will catch on?

In the US, Google has collaborated with Sprint to enable campaigns with 1-800 Contacts, 1-800-Flowers.com, Booking.com, SnapTravel and Subway, among others, along with messaging partners 3C, CM.com, Mobivity, Open-Market, Smooch and Twilio. We're also working with Telcel to bring campaigns to Mexico soon with 5 Piso, Broxel, DHL Mexico and Secretaria de Salud along with messaging partners Airmovil, Auronix, Aldeamo and Tiaxa.

For example, Subway—along with messaging partner Mobivity—sent promotions with detailed images and as a result, saw 144 percent increase in redemption rate compared to the same promotion using SMS.

Also Cinemex, Chicago Transit Bot, Elements Massage, Farm Journal Mobile, Overstock, Paris St. Germain, Redbox, SeatGeek, the Sacramento Kings, UnoTV, and Zerorez are engaging with their customers using RCS.

These messaging experiences are built as part of Google's Early Access Program with messaging partners 3CInteractive, Bowtie, Concepto Movil, myElefant, nativeMSG, Podium, Quiq, Telcel, Vibes, and Zipwhip.

Brands are using RCS in a number of different ways, from status updates to feedback to customer service, all within the native messaging experience on Android. For example, with the ChiTransitBot, people riding Chicago's transit system can get directions and find out when the next train is coming. With Redbox, people can browse available movies and games, reserve their favorites, and find a box in just a few taps. And with Overstock, people can get purchase, shipping, and delivery confirmation as well as the option to rate a purchase after delivery or connect directly with customer service.

street what RCS is and they would look at you blankly.

For Rich Communications Services (RCS) is SMS 2.0 and on paper it offers a wide range of things that consumers already expect from OTT services such as WhatsApp, Facebook messenger, as well as SMS -like clients such as Apple's iMessage.

And yet uptake has been, to put it mildly, slow. According to research by Mobilesquared 12% of companies globally have RCS and use it. 55% of them use it for marketing and promotions, says Nick Lane, chief analyst at the company, and 36% for client support.

Among consumers the picture for RCS is yet more bleak. While SMS is regularly used by 22% of consumers to interact with companies, only 12% do it with RCS. Even Facebook Messenger is used by 8% of consumers, and twitter 4%.

> RCS is dead unless all – and I mean ALL – operators buy into it and push it out there, Google isn't really trying to get RCS going, it doesn't take it seriously: 10 years and only 55 MNOs globally signed up? That won't work

Compare that to the 59% that rely on email and you can see that even in the messaging savvy world in which we live, RCS is lagging behind.

These figures, however, belie what is really going on with RCS. According to Lane, 52% of consumers are interested in using RCS (once it is explained to them). The demand is there, believes Lane.

"RCS needs to be pushed out and both industry and consumers need to be educated about it," says Lane. In South America and Indonesia and Malaysia it is starting to get some traction, but the operators have bought into it and are pushing it, he says.

Elsewhere this isn't the case.

"RCS is dead unless all – and I mean ALL – operators buy into it and push it out there," warns Andreas Constantinides, Commercial Director at messaging company Yuboto. "Google isn't really trying to get RCS going, it doesn't take it seriously. After 10 years only 55 MNOs globally are signed up and it won't work unless all MNOs sign up."

According to Constantinides, Google needs to do much more research into how retailers are going to use this, or indeed what they want from it, since they are going to be who are paying for it.

There is also the problem that, like SMS, RCS won't work unless it works across all networks. This is perhaps why SMS is so popular and so hard to beat: everyone can use it. It is also why all other messaging services and other services that rely on messaging default to SMS when all else fails. It just works.

Until RCS can achieve this it is dead in the water.

Part of the problem is that Google keeps changing its messaging priorities. It recently ditched its fledgling WhatsApp-killer Allo to launch Chat, a messaging services that, well, does exactly what WhatsApp and iMessage do.

But while it struggles to take on WhatsApp, it loses sight of what RCS can achieve.

telemedia

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FROM THE EDITOR

Industry proves itself vital to VAS, entertainment and commerce at World Telemedia – next stop MWC

Content and value added services are as nothing without the marketing, payment and distribution technologies that sit behind them. In this issue of Telemedia magazine – inspired by the wealth of content at this year's World Telemedia Marbella show – this dependence on technology has never been more clear.

What is particularly interesting is that, while the need is no new, how VAS and content are discovered, distributed and monetised is changing.

Many of the old ways of doing things are still valid, but increasingly the likes of affiliate marketing, Google ads, blockchain and cryptocurrencies are coming bear on how services are found and paid for.

This shift into new areas – or rather the entrepreneurial embracing of these news technologies by telemedia players – is deeply encouraging. Moving to look at how blockchain can help fight scams and fraud is a huge step forward – as is pledging to bring the complex value chain that makes up affiliate marketing networks to share data.

These moves show just how mature and important the telemedia industry has become. In a decade it has transformed itself from the very periphery of telecoms to being front and centre in the way many consumers now interact with services on the web.

While network operators may still be shy of this fact, the change is clear – and it is a change that will see this sector boom.

With the next big event in the telecoms calendar – Mobile World Congress – coming in February, it is time to focus this new found confidence out into the wider world. Where once Hall 8.1 at MWC was tucked away at the arse end of the show – literally as well as figuratively – it is increasingly going to be the go to place for brands and retailers, media companies, TV companies and more, all looking at how to get into this value chain. See you there.

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Paul Skeldon, editor

Affiliate marketing: Bridging the gap

Affiliate marketing is in a state of flux – threatened by AI, bots and Google ads. Now is the time for the industry to work together and share information, writes **Paul Skeldon**

Affiliate marketing is changing. Where once it was an add on, it soon became a key part of how to market Value Added Services (VAS). As its popularity grew, so too did the fraud and hijacking and, almost inevitably, it is now starting to wane.

However, this doesn't spell the end of affiliate marketing: it still has a key role to play, it just needs to be run differently – the industry needs to talk.

The challenges facing affiliate marketing are myriad. "The challenge from AI [artificial intelligence] and bots are lowering pay-out rates, big media companies are looking elsewhere for revenue and fraud is still an issue," says Muhammed I Fareed, Head Of Carrier & Business Development, at MessageCloud.

According to Fareed and many others in the affiliate and VAS markets, there is a growing disconnect between affiliate networks, advertisers and VAS providers.

"We've tried to do more with reporting tools to help share data and knowledge," says Fareed. "It is crucial that the whole value chain share information – and we need a body to help achieve this."

James McAteer, CEO, at Cosmik agrees. "I think even the name 'affiliate' fills people with fear. There is a lot of distance between networks too. There will always be a rogue that slips through – but if we share and publicise that information then the industry can shut down those rogues faster."

Both McAteer and Fareed join a growing number of voices across marketing, affiliate, publishers and VAS providers calling for an independent body so that no one player has to share that data themselves, but can anonymously share it with such as body and it can help spread the word.

"We have seen whole countries disappear and it's such a complex food chain of operator, service provider, VAS, publishers and affiliates that there is an inevitable disconnect in information – it is about time that this trend was reversed and information starts to be fed back up the value chain so that problems can be identified quickly and dealt with," says Jason Kilby, Founder and CRO, Aragon Advertising.

"As an affiliate network we do all sorts of checks, pre-checks and process checks on an ongoing basis, but I don't think much of that information goes back up the value chain," he says.

NEXT STEPS

Kilby is keen to get a body that can help handle this flow of information up and running to give affiliate marketing a new boost. Having spent a lot of time in talks with affiliate networks, MNOs, aggregators and services providers, he wants to try and get such an independent body up and running by World Telemedia Marbella on 7-9 October 2019.

"We want to open up countries not just keep them closed and sharing information is going to make this happen," he says.

However, while there is an argument to clean up affiliate marketing through this sharing of information, there is another threat to it that is harder to tackle: Google.

"Affiliate traffic is dropping as Google ad traffic grows," says Toby Padgham, Co-Founder & Director, MCP. "Google can effectively scan out 98% of bad traffic and block ads and, because it works so well, Google ad traffic has consolidated and grown."

But Google sees things differently, keen to be part of the whole burgeoning world of VAS advertising, rather than being seen as an affiliate-killer.

"The industry is changing," says Josep Maria Avila, Business Development Manager, at Google. "I think that the industry needs to change to be more customer-centric and that is what Google is offering. Users are changing – they are researching more, even for the smallest purchases, they are more demanding and want it to be personal and the want it instantly. mVAS has to recognise that. What is the value-add? The industry really needs to understand that."

Avila believes that Google needs to help mVAS providers change. "We need to help them focus more on their customers and to develop more of what we call 'life time value'," he says. "We want to help them develop their business and grow, we want them to focus on long-term goals and that is what Google can do to help."

So, with the affiliate industry again in a state of flux, could Google's view be the one that changes everything – and does that mean the death of affiliate marketing? It's unlikely, but Google advertising is certainly changing things. Developing an industry wide body to feed information up and down the affiliate food chain is more important now than ever – not least to rise to the challenge set by Google.

Storytelling: is this content unicorn ready to retire yet?

Content unicorns are your top performing posts: the ones that get the best engagement rates, and generate the most traffic. Storytelling has long-been considered a winning tactic for creating content unicorns – with 57% of marketers saying it's their most successful tool. But has storytelling had its day? **Kayleigh Alexandra** takes a look

Are there now better ways of getting your audience to connect with your content than storytelling – is it time for storytelling to go into retirement, or is it still a relevant strategy for your content marketing efforts?

WHAT IS A CONTENT UNICORN?

According to Larry Kim, CEO of MobileMonkey, and founder of WordStream, content unicorns are your top performing posts: the ones that rank well, drive traffic to your website, and have high conversion rates. Essentially, they're the posts that actuallyachieve the goals you originally set out for you content.

How many of your posts can you expect to be unicorns? Almost none. Stats show that only the top 1-3% of content-published really hits the mark. This means it could take you upto 6 months of posting 4 pieces of content a week before getting a unicorn!

Storytelling has long been considered the marketer's best shot at catching a unicorn…

CONTENT MARKETING & STORYTELLING

Storytelling is nothing new — and it's still a powerful technique which many content marketers use in order to achieve unicorn status.

Widely regarded as the first ever piece of content marketing, The Furrow, was published by John Deere in 1895. Instead

of a hard sales technique, it was designed to educate, inform, and entertain its readers through content and storytelling.

And so content marketing was born — in a very early iteration of how we understand it today. Despite obvious developments since 1895, the role of storytelling in good content marketing is still as relevant today.

Here's why:

1. Clickbait is out

Publishers often use dubious techniques and sensational headlines to make us click — and people are getting tired of it. Online audiences are becoming savvier to the ways marketers try to capture our attention online — and people are demanding better, more measured content marketing.

Readers are fighting back against clickbait. Even the biggest international news publishers are getting comments from readers around the world complaining that the headline is over-inflated, drawn out, and worthless clickbait.

Storytelling is the antithesis to the cheap thrills of clickbait. A real story has the opposite values to clickbait. It's about adding to a reader's experience and taking the time to really entertain and inform them. Clickbait is all about luring you in with a headline — not actually offering you any value.

Readers have had enough of clickbait and are actively seeking out alternative content which really benefits them.

Clickbait is out, and storytelling is here to stay.

2. All about the journey

With all of the noise out there, marketers need to stand out and take their audience on a real journey. Good storytelling is a great way to do this: done right, it pulls its readers in and connects with them on an emotional level. Emotions are key when it comes to taking your readers on a journey that they will remember.

Patagonia is a good exampleof a brand taking its customers on a journey: arrive on their website, and you would be hard pushed to tell if you landed on an environmentally friendly adventure magazine or a retailer website. Classy, holistic, and value-packed content replace tawdry sales pitches.

By placing such high value on creating genuinely interesting content that inspires people to make their own journeys (with Patagonia equipment, of course) the brand story becomes even more limitless.

By taking your reader on a journey you're being truly authentic about who you are as a brand. Being authentic doesn't just add value to your readers. According to New York Times writer, Joel Comm, it's also one of the keys to upleveling your online marketing game. Check out Marketing Speakto find Joel's podcast episode, along with a range of other useful talks about content marketing.

3. Live the story

Even if you grab your content unicorn by the horns and throw yourself into storytelling, simply telling the story isn't enough these days: you need to live it and inspire your readers to do the same.

Thanks to social media, it's easier for brands to live their stories, and encourage customers to share their own. The fashion industry has 100% capitalised on this, encouraging customers to share images of themselves in Instagram posts and tweets.

Airbnb is all about the story: telling travelling tales from its community, rather than focusing on the nature of the platform.

And of course, all of those YouTube travel bloggers with millions of views? They're definitely living their stories.

A strong human element is important here: people buy from people, and authenticity wins over. Storytelling is the best way of conveying that authentic and people-led message.

Sure: tell your story, take your readers on a journey, but really livethat story if you want to take your content to unicorn level.

4. Storytelling becomes story-doing

Audiences don't just want to be passive listeners. Instead, they are looking for brands to actively engage with them.

If you want to meet that content unicorn, you really need to inspire your audience to live their own experiences, connecting them with their favourite brands. Storytelling has not retired; if anything, it has grown up and become story-doing.

Every journey is a story, every human has a story, and every brand sells stories. Implemented as part of a strong marketing strategy, great storytelling becomes story-doing, and ultimately leads to kind of connected experiences that every marketer wants its audience to have.

Conclusion: The Unicorn Is Here to Stay

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that storytelling is far from a fad which has had its day. In fact, it remains one of the most effective ways for you to increase sales through content. Capitalise on everything that storytelling has to offer content marketers by avoiding clickbait, taking your audience on a journey, being authentic, living the story, and encouraging your audience to become story-doers instead.

Kayleigh Alexandra is a content writer for Micro Startups — a site dedicated to giving through growth hacking. Visit the blog for your latest dose of startup, entrepreneur, and charity insights from top experts around the globe, along with tips on how to tell a story with every piece of content you write. Follow us on Twitter @getmicrostarted

Monetising interactivity

Interacting with TV has long seemed like a natural way to monetise passively watching programmes – but with fewer people watching and mobile now the screen of choice, interaction with TV is a very different beast. **Paul Skeldon** reports

Coming up in December on Netflix will be a very special episode of Black Mirror. Mirroring the dystopian world view of the series, Netflix is going to offer a chilling insight into the future of TV – adding the ultimate in interactivity: you choose what happens next.

The TV streaming service that has so shaken up TV as we know has, in fact, been offering this service in some of its kids shows for several months, but the Black Mirror roll out is a big deal. This choose what happens next is the ultimate in interactive TV services, but is one that has been tried so many times before over the years and has always fallen short.

To date, technical constraints have really what have held this back. Browsing choices in video was hard to pull off. Asynchronous streaming technologies pioneered by Napster and Pirate Bay and refined by Netflix and Amazon Prime could just make it possible – and it could usher in a whole new era of interactive TV.

While the Black Mirror idea is one to watch, monetising interaction with TV platforms has long been a mainstay in telemedia. But TV is falling from grace. Fewer people watch TV than ever before, turning to a range of devices to watch the likes of YouTube, Instagram and Netflix. Monetising interaction has peaked and dropped from mainstream TV.

Is interactive TV dead?

In a word, no. "TV is a trusted device and mobile is now its remote control – and it offers way more than the 'red button' ever could," says David Wainwright, CEO, Hollywood TV. "The mobile is definitely the first screen these days, but TV is firmly the second – but using the two together can create services that people will pay for."

According to Wainwright, quizzes, games, lotteries, casino games, shopping and adult are all interactive TV services that people will pay for and which can generate revenue still – "you just have to build trust and show just how good these games are," he says.

"Freemium models are great to get people using these services and you can then build a relationship. But your service has to be slick and good and fun," says Wainwright. "It will make money but it won't be profitable on day one."

WHAT WORKS?

With such a small but potentially revenue generating market, there has been quite a bit of innovation in TV interaction services. "It is lucrative worldwide and we are seeing new formats, new technologies, new programmes and new outlets," says Claire McLaughlin, COO, The Cyber Authority.

That said, according to McLaughlin, the formats that are still going strong are old and well established formats in TV and radio that still attract huge numbers of participants, so while there are lots of new things that can be done with new tech, the old faithfuls can also be great.

"[These services are] relevant to people's lives and fit in with shows that people like – it resonates with them," explains Joanna Cox, General Manger, Association for Interactive Media & Micropayments (AIMM). "The key is to slot new services in seamlessly around them and build those up."

AIMM is working hard to help promote interactive TV and radio services under Cox's stewardship. These services have the potential to generate vast revenues and to be a key mainstream driver for getting people using direct carrier billing.

According to Cox there are three key elements for creating a successful interactive TV service.

- Mechanic – to skill or not to skill and at what level?
- Delivery of mechanic – frequency, entry method
- Prize – is bigger always better? Everyone loves a winner.

"Get these right and you get more consumer trust and you start to see ARPU rising," says Cox.

THEN WHAT?

While there are a cabal of hardcore interactive TV users, the number of casual players are dropping off, spread out over more channels and services and finding their kicks everywhere from other TV channels to gaming apps and even games and services on social media.

Television is still there and is the trusted man in the room, but increasingly any channel needs to 'more than just TV' – the television component is just part of a multimedia offering, with interactivity spread over these channels liberally.

"TV players need to look much more at what they can do off-air as much as what they do on air," says McLaughlin. "People just use TV as part of their interaction."

Interestingly, the charity sector is also playing a role here. As seen in our look at direct carrier billing opportunities (see page 4), charity donations not only kickstart the use of carrier billing in mainstream markets, but are also forcing price points available up.

With £30 donations looking to be introduced, it could also provide a much needed fillip for the interactive TV game – increasing what can be spent.

Perhaps, however, it is the nexus of these sorts of services, traditional TV programming and other services built around them that will win the day?

Facebook is experimenting with adding interactive polls and quizzes to TV shows run on its Watch platform. These add a new layer to TV programming – rather than seeking to reinvent the wheel a la Netflix – which offer not only a way to encourage interaction and social comment, but can also generate vast quantities of data.

Social media has already shown that viewers aren't necessarily passive watchers, but opinionated interlocutors that want to have their say and make their views known.

Understanding this holds the key to how to monetise interaction with TV and leverage the VAS and tools of telemedia to do so.

Block clicks and sleep well

Understanding the APK attack world

Apps are big business, not just in terms of developing and selling them, but in the data they can produce, the in-app purchases that can be made through them and the CPAs that they can generate.

And where there is money there is fraud – and apps have started to attract a new kind of fraud that is eating away at the fabric of what makes apps profitable and the data that can be generate therein.

These APK attacks – Android PacKage attacks – are on the increase and take full advantage of Android's open source coding to see fraudsters effectively hijack an app and all that goes on with it.

By copying an Android app's open code and creating an APK file, you can essentially 'own' the whole code within the app including, crucially, the tracking code.

This APK code can then be linked to a website to create a self-standing 'app store', with real apps, detached from the actual Google Play store. Fraudsters manage to not only make money from downloads and in-app purchases, but also to benefit from stealing marketing campaigns for the app from its developer.

"APK fraud draws down revenues from CPAs and so is a massive fraud," says Geoff Cleaves, MD, Opticks, a fraud prevention company. "Much of it comes from Russia, but increasingly we are seeing a lot of APK attacks now originating in India."

But APKs take many forms, what is the industry up against? Here are five mobile marketing frauds and APKs to watch…

1. CPM (COST PER MILE) FRAUDS

Ad Stacking or View Fraud: Multiple display ads are stacked on top of one another in a single ad placement. The user gets to view only the top ad but all the advertisers (of ads in layers) are charged for fake ad impressions.

Invisible Pixels: Ads are stuffed as a single pixel on the screen, which obviously is invisible to the user and the advertiser is charged for the impression.

Unstoppable Ads: Apps are manipulated to load ads continuously, even when the user is not using the app.

Video auto-play: Fraudsters play video ads automatically in the background when the user isn't watching or is unaware of the ad.

2. CPC (COST PER CLICK) FRAUDS

Automatic Redirection: Even when the user has not clicked on the ad, the fraudster maliciously redirects the user to the ad's landing page. If the user eventually takes an action like downloading an app, it falsely attributes conversion to the publisher.

Deceptive Ads: You might have come across advertisements that serve as a warning or an alert or pose as an advertisement for some product and when you click on it you land on a totally unrelated page. Often close or X button is misused, to trick the user to click, when they are trying to close the ad. Such ads deceive

Fighting off the IT cyber threat

Cyber attacks on businesses are on the up and, worryingly, 60% of SMEs go under within 24 months of being attacked. In telecoms, IT and telemedia, cyber attacks are a growing threat and one that needs to be tackled.

And it is becoming vital. Consider a recent visit to a well-known company disrupting the mini-cab and taxi business. It has strict security at its offices, not least forcing visitors to be scanned in a metal detector on their way in. Great if you are worried about the threat of knives and guns, but what about the mobile phone that one puts in a plastic tray outside the detector when you go through? That never gets looked at – in fact it is actively by-passing even this very basic security – yet it is possibly the most dangerous thing being taken into the building.

This practice is common place in all companies – and it is effectively useless against the main threat that all of today's data-driven businesses face.

As a result, several high-profile telemedia figures have joined forces to form The Cyber Authority, a body designed to promote cyber security and to help bring together the people with the tools to combat IT and telecoms industry specific cyber attacks with the people who need them.

One such company is Cy-oT – Cyber of Things, which offers tools to help businesses protect themselves from the growing threat to being cyber attacked through the growing number of connected devices found in offices these days.

And that doesn't just mean smartphone and other 'bring your own devices' – it centres on these and the number of web-enabled IoT devices that are creeping into everyday life.

Cy-oT delivers an Enterprise-Grade defense that fills the IoT cybersecurity gap, continuously identifying and monitoring all the smart connected devices in your surrounding airspace, so you have total visibility, active threat detection and real-time attack mitigation to protect your assets and operations, while safely embracing IoT and wireless technologies.

It can monitor thousands of devices in 100 square meter sectors and look for unusual and odd traffic, IP addresses and more to flag the beginnings of any sort of cyber attack so that they can be blocked.

both the users as well as the advertisers.

3. CPI (COST PER IMPRESSION) FRAUD

Installation/Activation Fraud: This is related to fake installs. Malicious software is used to create fake installs. Sometimes, device information is rigged, or app SDK is cracked to send virtual information (like app download) to the network or app store.

Sometimes a group of people is hired with many mobile devices to manually install applications (click farms)

Attribution Fraud (Click Stuffing): Here fraudsters try to capitalize on 'first click' or 'last click' attribution. They try to identify the users who are about to make a purchase and target ads to them or artificially stuff clicks (just before the purchase) using a device or user details to make it look like the user completed the click.

Click Spam and Click Injection: Click Spam or organic poaching executes clicks on the user's behalf without him being aware of the same. For instance - if a user lands on a malicious page (or app) the fraudster could run clicks in the background, execute interaction with an ad, send impression-to-clicks as if it has converted to engagement or send clicks from false device-ids.

Click Injection is an advanced form of click spam where a malicious app listens to 'install broadcasts' and detects when an app is about to be installed and triggers a click just before the install.

> APK fraud draws down revenues from CPAs and so is a massive fraud. Much of it comes from Russia, but increasingly we are seeing it originate in India too

4. POST-INSTALL FRAUD

Registration Fraud: Hired workers (farming) register on landing pages using fake account(s).

Value of Install Frauds: After a fake install, bots simulate user behavior to trick advertiser into being a legitimate user, so he is motivated to run more campaigns.

Hacking the postback URL & APK: Hackers manipulate installation postback URL and fake bulk installs on a single click or bulk clicks on the ads. Thus, it becomes difficult to ascertain if your campaign has been successful or the users are fake.

to interact with ads, visiting landing pages, and showing an intent to purchase.

5. SPOOFING

Cookie Stuffing: Multiple cookies are attached to the user and when the conversion occurs the fraudster gets paid instead of the publisher.

Domain Spoofing: Fraudsters portray their low-profile websites as premium websites and when the user unconsciously clicks on them, the malware on their site runs on the user browser and gain access to ad tags and impersonate property. So, the advertisers think their ads are running on a premium website, while in fact, it is running on substandard properties.

This list is not exhaustive but covers major frauds that should be on your checklist while running your campaigns.

As technology advances, fraudsters will come up with ingenious ways to cheat the system. Advertisers have a lot of catching up to do in being vigilant and devising measures to counter fraud.

ICOs: Life in the new dog yet?

Initial coin offerings (IOCs) are a novel and interesting way to leverage cryptocurrencies and blockchain to raise funds. But have they been and gone – killed by scammers – or is their life in the new dog yet? **Paul Skeldon** reports

The world of cryptocurrencies is dominated by the headline grabbers Bitcoin and Etherium, but that belies a whole world of digital tokens and other things of digital value that are out there – all of which are worth something to someone. And where there is worth, there is trade.

This is the ethos behind initial coin offerings (ICOs), which are used to generate real-world revenue through these crypto-currencies in much the same way as money is raised using share or stock issues. The only difference is that ICOs are less well regulated and so 'easier' to do.

To work an ICO needs to offer the public the chance to invest in a digital currency that offers either a direct benefit to them – it being something that they can actually do something with – or something that is going to be in greater future demand and so will rise in value.

Either works and both can raise money – and increasingly such ICOs are being used to produce investment for the development of new games, services and more.

THE NAME OF THE GAME

This kind of digital crowd funding has gained marked interest of late and has seen some key uses in telemedia. Game Developer Tony Pearce created a mobile game that combines the 'shoot-em-up' gory glory of Call of Duty with the augmented reality (AR) overlay of Pokemon Go and that allows players to find other players out in the real world and, using AR, do battle with them within the environment they find themselves in.

While a novel game in itself, Pearce decided to fund its development through an ICO – based around selling limited edition add-on weapons for the, then unfinished and unlaunched, game with a view to raising both money and profile.

Pearce was looking to raise $1.5million through the ICO and created a store for the weapons and demos of what the game would look like when live and put the limited edition weapons on sale.

The weapons flew off the shelves and, within 14 months, had raised $3million through 1500 individual wallets.

"It was a massive success and really surprising how quickly it worked," Pearce says. "But it wasn't always easy. There were problems."

WATCH THOSE WALLETS

While ICOs are a new and interesting way to raise money, they are inherently unregulated and scamsters and crooks have been quick to get in on the act. Pearce's ICO experienced what many others have come across: scammers build an exact replica of the ICO-ing game or site, with a slightly different, albeit plausible, URL and many innocent investors give them their money instead of the legit site.

Here the buyers get nothing for their money and many ICOs loose almost as much money through these scams as they legitimately raise.

"This is why ICOs are dying or dead," says David Wainwright, CEO, Hollywood TV. "Well as we know them today. Increasingly, AI will be used to understand who the buyers are and tokens will be listed more as equity tokens rather than being sold as something with that direct value."

In Wainwright – and many other's – view, ICOs are heading towards becoming just a part of the mainstream investment market, turning instead to equities and securities, traded by AI-powered systems, rather than some sort of alternative crowd funding model.

According to data from ICO-rating.com, only 7% of ICOs from Q2 have been able to secure listings; 55% of all ICOs from this period failed to hit their funding target; 15% of projects already had a working business, versus 6% in Q1, and whether or not this was the case had no effect on fundraising success.

But the numbers don't bear this out. According to research by journalists at Forbes, collectively, ICOs of 2018 have already raised $11,690,981,663 of investments, which is 10 times bigger than the cumulative sum of investments from ICOs of Q1-2 2017. Excluding EOS, the cumulative amount of funding received from ICOs of Q1-2 2018 is 6.4 times bigger than the one of Q1-2 2017.

The total amount raised in the second quarter of 2018 is: $8.4 billion dollars.

This doesn't look dead, but there is the problem that now there are so many ICOs, that many – 55% according to Forbes – didn't complete their run or hit their target.

There was much talk about ICOs at World Telemedia in Marbella in October and it seems that, while the ICO model is changing, they are still an interesting area to watch – especially if you are looking for funding.

Faster than lightning

Blockchain is slowly becoming the technology that underpins everything from tokens and cryptocurrencies to even data storage, services contracts and more. But it is in payments where it could really make a big difference. Paul Skeldon reports

Blockchain is going to revolutionise our digital world – what we have seen so far is only the start. Blockchain proves provenance and offers, to coin a phrase, 'trustless trust'. Its decentralised approach to authenticating anything digital that is transact is peerless.

However, it can be slow – too slow for, say, payments. And that is a problem.

Telemedia thrives on payments innovation and it is only to be expected that blockchain is going to impact that. However, currently, it is unable to process instant payments as there is a lag between doing the deal and the associated 'block' being added to the chain.

There is also the problem of fees. There is always a transaction fee with doing anything on the chain, a fee that can in times of high demand be quite high. This has, to date, made using blockchain to underpin instant payments uneconomical.

LIGHTNING THE LOAD

Enter The Lightning Network (LN). LN is a decentralised network that uses the smart contract functionality in the blockchain to enable instant payments across a network of participants.

One of the key elements of blockchain are smart contracts. A smart contract is essentially "a computerised transaction protocol that executes the terms of a contract". A blockchain-based smart contract is visible to all users of said blockchain and underpins the veracity of the transaction on that chain.

LN uses blockchain's native smart-contract scripting language to create a secure network of participants, each of which is able to transact at high volume and high speed.

This means that within a closed group of users, transactions can be processed instantly as the contracts can be instantly visible to all participants.

HOW IT WORKS

Two participants create a ledger entry on the blockchain that requires both participants to sign off on any spending of funds. Both parties create transactions that refund the ledger entry to their individual allocation, but do not broadcast them to the blockchain. This is a bidirectional payment channel.

Each can update their individual allocations for the ledger entry by creating many transactions spending from the current ledger entry output. Only the most recent version is valid, which is enforced by blockchain-parsable smart-contract scripting.

This entry can be closed out at any time by either party without any trust or custodianship by broadcasting the most recent version to the blockchain.

By creating a network of these two-party ledger entries, it is possible to find a path across the network similar to routing packets on the internet. The nodes along the path are not trusted, as the payment is enforced using a script which enforces the atomicity (either the entire payment succeeds or fails) via decrementing time-locks. This is The Lightning Network.

BLOCKCHAIN AS ARBITER

As a result, it is possible to conduct transactions off-blockchain without limitations. Transactions can be made off-chain with confidence of on-blockchain enforceability. This is similar to how one makes many legal contracts with others, but one does not go to court every time a contract is made. By making the transactions and scripts parsable, the smart-contract can be enforced on-blockchain.

Only in the event of non-co-operation is the court involved – but with the blockchain, the result is deterministic.

PAYMENTS

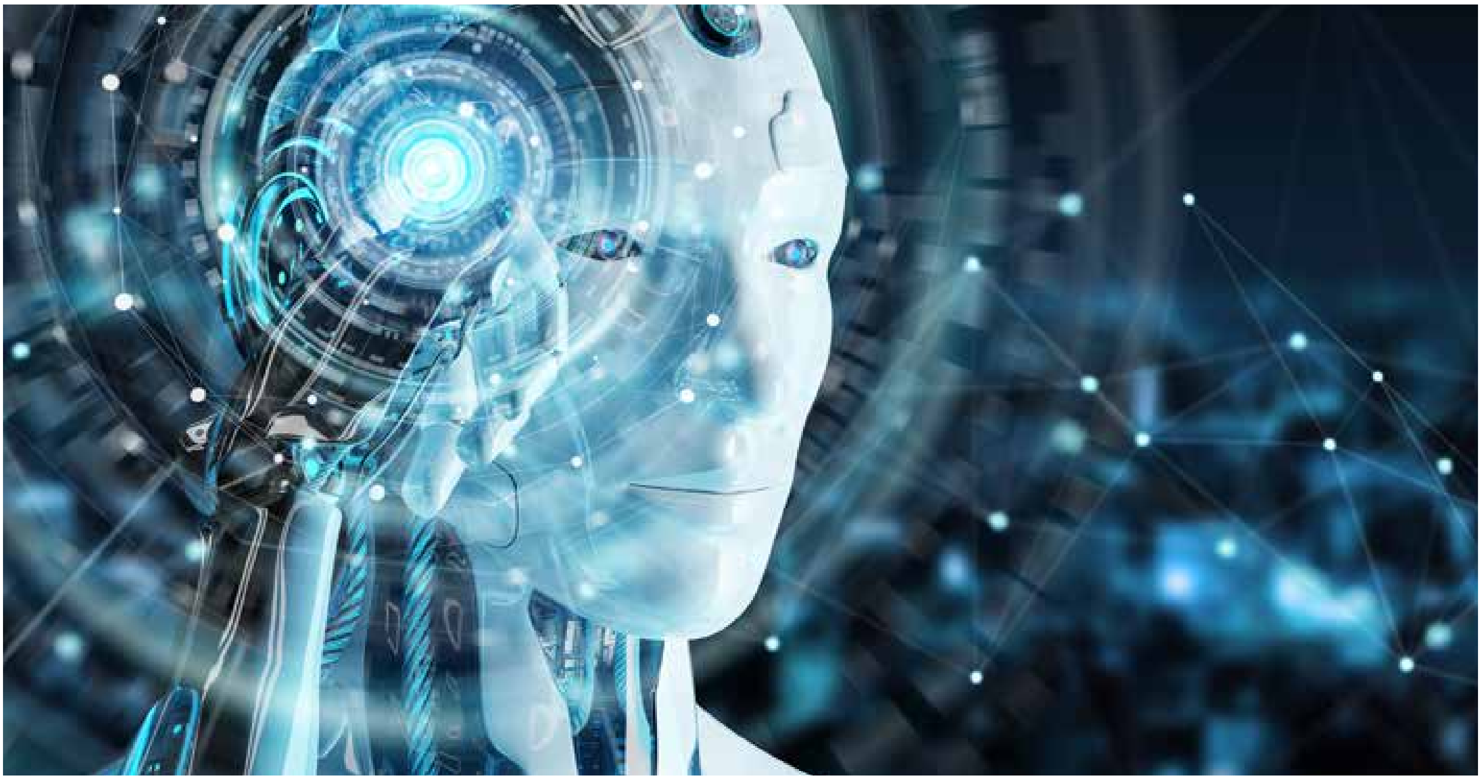
Using LN it is possible to have instant payments and this is likely to see blockchain start to underpin all manner of transactions as a result. LN removes the lag and the cost from using blockchain for payments and to prove the point a Swiss Café now accepts payments for cakes and coffee with Bitcoin.

Similarly, Spanish hardware hacker Ricardo Reis created a mocked-up vending machine accepting Bitcoin payment through LN. A customer scans a QR code in order to make the payment from their Lightning-enabled wallet.

Blockchain is increasingly ready for the mainstream world – the question is are you ready to start using it?

The Internet of me: reshaping the brand-consumer relationship

The Internet of Things connects, well, things together, but what about people? With everyone increasingly online and interconnected, could there be a sea change in how people manage their own data – and could that radically reshape marketing? **Paul Skeldon** reports



You can't have too much of me, can you? It seems that in this day and age, you can. No, not me, personally, but all the digital mes – or I guess yous – that now haunt the web. There is messaging me, social me, work me, home me, dating me, adult me, parent me, partner me… the list is endless.

Each of these 'mes' is a separate data entity, with different habits and likes and needs, and as such should be looked at separately. Today's marketing technology seeks to make everything 'personal', but it fails to address this basic issue: there are many personal mes, each one different.

"There are myriad privacy and data issues caused by this," says journalist and 'internet of Me' (IoMe) expert Tim Green. "The data any organisation has is often incomplete and the picture it paints is certainly incomplete. What we have now works, but is creepy and a little weird."

Green gives the example of buying a vacuum cleaner on Amazon. "Your Hoover breaks, so you search Amazon for a new one, buy it and have it delivered and once again have a nice clean home. But Amazon now thinks that you are some sort of vacuum aficionado or hobbyist – rather than just someone that needed a new Hoover – and repeatedly tries to tempt you with Hoovers."

It is a pain and, in the era of mass personalisation, it is increasingly something that consumers see as a drawback and potentially a reason to go and shop elsewhere. It is, in short, a deal breaker.

BAD FOR COMPANIES

This massive data gathering idea simply doesn't work anymore. Not only is it making the personalisation offering distinctly impersonal and annoying, it is starting to be counterproductive.

Businesses want as much data on their consumers as possible, but they aren't looking at the people as people, just as data – data that, since it is generated by all the different mes, is often contradictory and gives the wrong impression. I needed a Hoover, I am not a vacuum cleaner collector.

While this leads to poor marketing, it is also bad for companies. They have to invest in massive servers and data farms at great expense. They also then run the risk of data breaches and the attendant bad publicity and clean up charges.

If all that wasn't bad enough, they now have to deal with increasingly legal costs as all that data comes under GDPR.

And, as we have seen, despite keeping all this data at great expense, it doesn't really do the job. A lot of it is inaccurate – or certainly paints an inaccurate picture of the customers – and increasingly, leads to poor marketing, poor personalisation and puts consumers off a brand, rather than engaging them.

Something has got to give.

REVVING UP VRM

There is an idea that is gaining ground that could see the way consumers and brands interact – vendor relationship management (VRM). This idea has been around since the 2000s, but only in the age of IoT and true web ubiquity has it started to be seen as something that can be deployed – and it turns the way brands and consumers interact on its head.

"Say I want to buy a baby stroller," says Green. "Rather than searching the web for strollers and getting endless stroller ads each time I open websites, I put out into the world that I am looking for a stroller and the vendors come to me?"

The idea was first mooted by Doc Searls, who believes that VRM will help create what he calls an intention economy.

"The Intention Economy grows around buyers, not sellers," says Searles. "It leverages the simple fact that buyers are the first source of money, and that they come ready-made. You don't need advertising to make them. The Intention Economy is about markets, not marketing. You don't need marketing to make Intention Markets."

In May 2012 Searl's book titled The Intention Economy was published by Harvard Business Press. Searls also sees VRM addressing some of what he calls the "unfinished business" of The Cluetrain Manifesto, which he co-wrote in 1999 with Christopher Locke, Rick Levine and David Weinberger. Here he refers to Cluetrain's preamble, which says "We are not seats or eyeballs or end users or consumers. We are human beings—and our reach exceeds your grasp. Deal with it."

This idea of people being treated as people and being able to choose who and how they interact with brands is radical and potentially hugely disruptive.

"Using tools such as Personal Information Management Systems (PIMS) – such s CozyCloud or DigiMe, which are available right now – the user takes control of their data," says Green. "Using these tools the person shows what they want to show to which brands they want to see it – so you may show certain data to an insurance company, but a different set of your data to Amazon."

In this way, the user is in control of 'who' they are online and how that data can be used.

MASSIVE IMPLICATIONS

And the implications are enormous. Take the insurance company example: by sharing the right data with an insurance company there can be instant onboarding, instant claims, slashed costs and more relevant engagement.

They would know, for example, that my windscreen has been cracked when it happens – since I socially shared the fact and dissed Drivefly parking who broke it – and would instantly contact me about repair.

Similarly, when I need to buy a new Hoover, I can ask the vendors – telling them or sharing with them, my needs and specification – and let them fight over giving me a good deal.

While this is great for the consumer, it has good and bad implications for vendors. Where this to be taken up in a mainstream way, at a swoop, it would level the data playing field. Companies such as Amazon and Facebook that can afford to keep masses of data on individuals suddenly find themselves no better off than a small independent start up with no data base.

The consumer holds all the data and shares it with whomever they want to share it with, not the other way around. This has the power to totally transform ecommerce and retail. And if that isn't enough, Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the internet sees this a the next era of the web, no less.

Fancy some PIMS?

The key to reshaping the data economy and instigating the era of 'me' lies in Personal Information Management Services (PIMS). These are apps that users populate with all their data and then choose who to share what of it with. There are several already on the market, but one of the immediate opportunities for the telemedia sector lies in developing PIMS. So what is available right now?

Digi.me
One of the leading PIMS in the Apple App Store, Digi.me automatically gets all your data from thousands of different sources and then lets the user decide how it can be used. The key thing is that Digi.me – like any good PIM – does not hold any of the data, it just manages it for the user. Primarily focussed on the US (and, oddly, Iceland) Digi.me is a a great example of how these things can work.

Mimecast
Mimecast is an email management portal that offers cloud email services for continuity and archiving emails. Mimecast's headquarters is in London, England and has a revenue of $261.9M and 1,200 employees. Mimecast has raised a total of $160.7M in funding. As of October 2018, Mimecast has 5300 fans on Facebook and 18,400 followers on Twitter.

Archive Social
ArchiveSocial provides social media archiving solution for records management, regulatory compliance and e-discovery. ArchiveSocial's headquarters is in Durham, North Carolinaand has a revenue of $1.3M, and 42 employees. It has attracted a latest funding round for $940,000 in May 2014 and has 601 fans on Facebook and 1500 followers on Twitter.

Smarsh
Smarsh provides electronic communications archiving solutions for social media platforms, email and instant messaging. Smarsh is a Private company. It generates $240,700 in revenue per employe and its most recent acquisition was Cognia Corporation for an undisclosed amount in Aug 2017.

#TECH PROVIDER

#SP & AGGREGATOR

#SUPPORT SERVICES

#CONTENT PROVIDER

#NETWORK OPERATOR

#BILLING

#MEDIA&MARKETING

Number cruncher

Six of the best – here are 6 of the most thought-provoking slides from this year's World Telemedia in Marbella. Starting on the left, we see an outline of just what you need to build an interactive service, as well as the ARPU you can expect, from Jo Cox at AIMM. Below that we see just how complex the modern digital advertising market is, with this lovely diagram from MCP. The role of messaging is looked at globally here by Yuboto, showing just how dominant some OTT messaging apps are. Top right we stick with messaging, taking a look at how much A2P messaging there is and how there is quite an opportunity for OTT and RCS, according to MobileSquared. In the middle on the right Fin Tech Times shows us that the world of money as we know it is about to change, while bottom right, Strex shows just how many big brands in Denmark now use carrier billing following an effort to educate the market. These and all the other presentation – including audio – are now available online, free to all WT18 delegates.