monetizing connected consumers

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BILLING & PAYMENT

DCB – the time is now as it hits mainstream services worldwide

The rise in digital service use across lockdown has pushed direct carrier billing forward by many years in just a few short months. It is now being widely used worldwide for services ranging from Google Play to subscribing to TV channels. So just what has been happening? Paul Skeldon finds out

June 2020 proved to be the pivotal month for direct carrier billing (DCB), with games companies, TV services, telcos and Google Play stores round the world signing up with telemedia companies to provide the billing option to clients – and with great results.

Before we get to how Epic Games, DAZN, Claro Peru, Viettel and Airtel Tanzania – among others – have leveraged DCB around their subscriptions services, stores and Google Play, an interesting marketing push in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with Bango has shown just how effective DCB can be.

MESSAGING & ENGAGEMENT

Voice tech gets a boost from lockdown digital life – here are some of the winners

As the world goes digital, one thing that sticks out is that voice is once again getting a lot of attention – with voice now increasingly being used once again for customer service and even outbound engagement. Paul Skeldon takes a look at some of the trends

Back in the early days of the lockdown we reported on how voice services were starting to make a bit of a comeback, with many consumers looking to a good old-fashioned call to communicate with their friends and

family.

And there has been a surge in tech activity to better service these voice callers.

IMIMobile, for instance, has joined Google's Verified Calls programme, which seeks to help businesses not appear as random calls to help connect businesses and customers and help use the voice channel for better engagement.

Businesses spend $1.3 trillion on 265 billion customer service calls each year, yet 87% users will not answer the phone un-

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DCB

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UAE-based carrier du teamed up with Bango to target-market DCB at customers that its data showed had used it before or were likely to use it. The offer was to use DCB to pay for OTT services from the Google Play store.

And they saw a 20% uptake, with a fifth of those targeted immediately using DCB at least once to buy. More crucially, this 20% signed up to DCB based on the message.

This shows that getting the message right to consumers about the power of DCB – its ease of use, the growing variety of places it can be used and the spend limits built it to protect customers as much as merchants – gets results.

GETTING THE MESSAGE

This is a message, if you'll pardon the pun, that MNOs worldwide need to heed. DCB's time is very much now. Consumers are hungrier than ever to use their mobiles and they want a quick and easy way to pay: especially for entertainment, games, gambling, streaming and more.

Carrier billing fills that gap. As a mechanism for a quick fix, a try-out or a one-off it is second to none as it is so simple. But it needn't be just an on-boarder. As the likes of Google Play and Epic games are realising, it is increasingly a tool for regular payments, without having to subscribe.

Epic Games, for instance, has integrated DCB through Fortumo to collect payments for Fortnite Battle Passes, game purchases in the Epic Games Store and other Epic Games content.

Launching in Spain, the service is tapping into the fact that, worldwide Carrier billing is estimated to account for 14% of all digital gaming transactions in Western Europe. This makes it the third most popular payment method for gaming in the region after credit cards and digital wallets.

The service is being used to pay for in-game content, third-party content and game development tools and its two-stage payment process makes it ideal for these fast, one-off digital hits.

Claro Peru in Peru, meanwhile, is also working with DOMOCO to bring carrier billing to bear for digital purchases in the Samsung Galaxy store.

GOOGLE PLAY TAPS INTO DCB

Similarly, Google Play continues to roll out carrier billing around the world. While we have already seen over the past couple of years DCB being offered to Google Play users in Chile, Ghana, Nigeria,Bahrain, Kuwait, India and South Africa – to name but a few – across May and June, we have also seen it added to Google Play in Malaysia and Tanzania.

This is very much where the opportunity for DCB lies, believes Valentina Tranquilli, Co-Founder and COO at Cookies Factory. "I believe that MENA and Africa have the greatest potential, because they are regions with a strong demand for digital goods and an audience who is willing to pay for contents through its phone. These are emerging countries where all stakeholders are creating the conditions for growth in micropayments and we are investing a lot in terms of people and effort in these markets."

She continues: "From our own experience, in the MENA region

DCB

it is already mainstream, in fact, digital content and streaming is largely paid for using DCB. As the majority of potential gamers are located in mobile-first emerging markets and credit cards are not popular or suited for this type of consumers, DCB is a better solution, being by default available to any mobile phone owner, whether they are playing on their mobile, PC or on a console. DCB is deployed by many game developers and is among the most popular alternative payment methods for digital gaming.”

WHERE NEXT FOR DCB?

While these markets are driving DCB use, the lockdown has seen it spread to more mature markets – with some cool results.

“Video streaming contents are taking different advantages from carrier billing for two main reasons,” says Tranquilli. “The first one is related to the fact that now they have a much higher value compared to the past, while the second one regards the area in which they are achieving the greatest results, that is in particular in emerging markets where the credit card penetration is still low. A lot of big players in the video industry are adopting the subscription model (that has always been the “king” in Telemedia Industry) and they are collecting benefits from the possibility to charge users that they couldn't reach before, through mobile payment.”

She adds: “We have also noticed that companies that are not only able to launch, but also to properly promote local contents, are the ones that can better compete on the market. Adapting your contents, your marketing and your billing technologies is now key to stay competitive in the mobile vas industry.”

FISHING FOR BUSINESS

This has been borne out by UK subscription TV hannel Fishing TV, which now allows viewers to pay for subscriptions and pay-per-view on demand to their mobile phone bills using carrier billing.

Working with mobile payments and messaging specialist Fonix, the channel's customers will now be offered carrier billing as a payment choice on the payment page when they want to buy a subscription or access pay-to-view content, such fishing shows and films from around the world.

When users select the carrier billing option, they are automatically identified by their mobile phone, without having to input their number manually.

Fonix and Fishing TV have worked closely together on the implementation strategy, optimising the user flow and allowing the delivery of a highly compliant, scalable solution that will allow carrier billing payments to be processed internationally.

Ed Burgass, Commercial Director at Fishing TV comments: “As a brand, we are always looking at ways for fishing enthusiasts to conveniently access Fishing TV. Our partnership with Fonix means we can increase the current payment options we have for our customers to drive more traffic to our content globally. The services that Fonix have presented us with offer a real opportunity to give viewers the best experience when engaging with our channel.”

David Foord, Commercial Executive at Fonix says: “We see a real opportunity to help Fishing TV increase its content consumption by including DCB as a payment option.

Foord adds: “As a highly scalable solution that works globally, it's fully aligned with Fishing TV's plans to launch carrier billing into international markets.”

DCB and the contactless revolution

Direct carrier billing (DCB) is finding it mainstream groove in a variety of places thanks to the lockdown restrictions, but it is the loosening of some of those constraints that are providing it with another potential channel to market – contactless checkout and contactless ticketing.

Research by Juniper Research indicates that both these sectors are set to be revolutionised by contactless mobile tech, driven by consumers now being more used to them alongside their desire not to touch anything.

A study from the research company found that the value of transactions processed by smart checkout technologies – where the fixed checkout process is replaced by a frictionless model – will reach $387 billion in 2025, up from just $2 billion in 2020.

Smart checkout technologies provide much simpler user experiences by removing traditional checkouts; embracing a 'just walk out' approach. The rapid growth will be driven by retailers seeking sustainable business models in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the pandemic's impact is only an acceleration of a long-term decline in the fortunes of traditional retail.

A separate study from Juniper Research has found that digital ticket transaction volumes will exceed pre-COVID levels by 2022; rising from 12.7 billion in 2020 to 32 billion in 2022.

It anticipates that continued easing of global travel restrictions will drive increased demand for mobile ticketing in the rail, metro and bus sectors, as commuters return to work. The research Digital Ticketing: Industry Trends, Opportunities and Market Forecasts 2020-2025 urges transport authorities to execute swift transformation strategies to satisfy changing customer preferences or risk missing opportunities to reduce cash use and drive mobile ticketing adoption post pandemic.

The research also expects the ongoing pandemic to cause a permanent shift in consumer behaviour, resulting in significant increases in contactless payment adoption. Total contactless ticketing transaction volumes will grow from 1.7 billion in 2020 to 13 billion by 2022; representing a 200% growth.

To exploit this growth, the research urges transit operators and authorities to focus on contactless deployments to meet consumer expectations, as transport usage returns to pre-pandemic norms.

Research author Susannah Hampton comments: “Consumer perception of contactless payments has shifted from one of convenience to being essential. With increased post-pandemic demand for contactless ticketing, stakeholders must collaborate to rapidly overcome the barriers to contactless payments posed by a lack of standardised infrastructure.”

Both these studies point to the more generic use of mobile's contactless attributes to make things happen, but both – especially ticketing – are ideally suited to some form of carrier billing as a payment option. Tickets for buses and trains are low-enough value and have a compelling need for 'contactlessness' to make it particularly a key service for DCB.

DCB keeps on giving

The charity sector is getting a much-needed fillip from carrier billing during lockdown and beyond. Paul Skeldon explains

The charity sector has long been a fan of carrier billing, with many DCB services having been pioneered with charity TV shows and more.

Now, during the pandemic it has really come into its own, acting as a lifeline to many charities in many ways.

Perhaps the biggest impact it has had is in helping charities that rely on bricks and mortar sales to keep money rolling in while their stores are shut.

Cancer Research UK estimates the impact of Covid to be a 20-25% drop in its revenues – a shortfall of £120 million – and plans to re-open its shops on 29th June – subject to government guidance. The British Heart Foundation with 750 stores has lost £10 million a month during lockdown.

Oxfam has especially been under pressure it was generating £1.4 million per month through its shops and donation banks before COVID-19.

Smaller charities are under even more pressure.

However, mobile has provided some hope. Donations to charity by text grew from £37.9 million to £49.6 million in 2018/19, according to the PSA's latest report, which estimates that more than 25% of all donations to major telethons are being made via text.

"Mobile provides an easy mechanism for supporters to make donations and it appeals to a mobile aware younger demographic, which is so important to charities," says DMB's CEO Kevin Dawson. "83% of 75+ make donations compared with 69% of 16-24, year olds."

Mobile payments make an ideal charity donation mechanism. It is open to anyone with a mobile, feature or smartphone. It's a simple proposition for a consumer to understand and use, simply text a keyword to a 5-digit short code.

But what makes it so attractive to charities is that DMB is now offering it without any processing charges until October 2020, so that charities get 100% of the donations, zero setup and rental costs for the short code and zero payment processing fee costs. DMB have removed the commercial barriers of entry (to all charities) to help give back to the sector during this period of extraordinary uncertainty.

As well as this, DMB offer a Gift Aid recovery service to enable Charities to recoup Gift Aid on all donations.

The mobile donation proposition has really shaped up to best assist charities and for them to maximise the enormous scope of potential for mobile donations services.

Voice

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less they recognise the callers' number as fraudulent calls continue to be a significant issue.

Verified Calls solves this problem by displaying the verified identity and branding of the business as and when the call arrives on a consumer's device. Furthermore, the purpose of the call is also displayed providing additional context to consumers. Verified calls increase consumer trust and reduce customer service costs by reducing the number of unanswered calls.

Sudarshan Dharmapuri, EVP Products at IMImobile, explains: "Verified calls reduce friction and establish trust in business-to-consumer interactions, a theme that is central to our value proposition."

Meanwhile, Infobip, has launched Moments – a new omnichannel customer engagement hub – that helps marketers and brands create and activate highly effective campaigns that will resonate with customers on a personal level by providing a 360 view of the customer and unifying today's most popular communications applications onto one platform.

This allows brands to reach customers on their preferred channels with contextualised content that can very quickly help drive better outcomes for the business.

Adrian Benic, VP Products, Infobip, explains: "For those brands looking to provide a service that fosters trust and loyalty, simply knowing your customer isn't enough. You need to understand and empathise with them and know how they like to experience different channels. Some channels, like WhatsApp for example, are today widely used for everything from communicating with a health professional to a grocery delivery provider, so it's important to make sure you include something like this into the mix

and meet customers where they already are. Similarly, an SMS tends to be read instantly whereas an email might sit in someone's inbox for a while without needing an instant response. It's about understanding the ecosystem and planning customer engagement around that."

Benic adds: "Based on these behaviours, our 'Moments solution enables marketers to offer a truly bespoke experience by delivering messages on the widest range of programmable channels offered by any platform for today's modern consumer, at a time that's appropriate with relevant information. It's part of the evolution – spurred by the 'new normal' – to a customer centric form of marketing"

UNDERSTANDING WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

ResponseTap, one of Europe's leading call tracking providers, has ramped up its Speech Analytics offering, adding Speech AI, which uses advanced machine learning to capture call outcomes with more accuracy than any other product in the space.

And British Gas has been using it to work out how well its marketing activities have been going, as well as helping to improve the customer journey.

Alexander Soldatikhin, Digital Marketing Product Owner at British Gas, takes up the story:

"Using ResponseTap's Speech AI we have been able to gain a better understanding of which marketing activities have driven more value for the business, improve customer journeys and optimise marketing campaigns for a better ROI. The AI model built by the ResponseTap team has helped us achieve a higher level of accuracy than the current market benchmark, allowing us to manage marketing budgets more efficiently and support business growth. We are planning to continue using the solution and apply it across new channels and products."

Ross Fobian, CEO of ResponseTap, adds: "Speech analytics to this level of accuracy is something the industry has been trying to develop for years. With Speech AI, ResponseTap is providing customers with a cost-effective solution that is twice as accurate in outcome tracking as other tools on the market. We're delighted to be launching a superior offering that beats the industry benchmarks by leaps and bounds, enabling sales and marketing teams to thrive, in what remains a challenging period."

MONEY WHERE THE MOUTH IS

Finally, payments are also getting a voice. PCI Pal, a global provider of cloud-based secure payment solutions, has added

Speech Recognition capability for both its Agent Assist and IVR Payment solutions.

PCI Pal's customers now have the option of allowing callers to securely speak their credit card details over the phone, while PCI Pal securely processes the data and prevents it from entering the company's environment.

When payment is required, the customer simply reads out their credit card details, or can use their telephone keypad, when prompted by an agent or IVR to do so.

Customers now have a choice in how they provide their payment information, with the added advantage of an accessible option, which is ideal for people with physical disabilities who may find typing difficult, painful or impossible.

James Barham, CEO of PCI Pal, explains: "Speech Recognition has come a long way in the last five years, and we felt that now was the right time to launch this capability to give our partners and customers the choice of secure data capture methods during a live call. Having focused our efforts on building the most advanced, globally available, true cloud environment for securing payments,

Barham adds: "I'm very pleased that we are adding this feature to that platform as part of our Agent Assist and IVR products." ◾

WhatsApp Business:
the new normal for online customer interaction

WhatsApp is increasingly where it's at for customer interaction – but what does that mean in practice? **Jean Shin** *explains*

The rise of digitisation has transformed all industries, leading to more customers bypassing their local stores and engaging with e-commerce, which is projected to surpass $4.8 trillion globally. Coronavirus has hastened this – and the shift looks permanent.

Online retailers are still facing new and existing challenges, including providing a range of tailored delivery options, so customers feel safe when they receive orders and managing the increasing demand for customer services as consumers continue to order from home and are less willing to go to physical stores or branches for support.

And they need to make it personal.

DIGITAL CLIENTELING
The personal touch matters: 80% of self-classified 'frequent shoppers' will only shop with brands who personalise their experience, according to Smarter-HQ. The 'new normal' brought about by the pandemic has effectively shelved opportunities for in-store interactions.

To counteract this, forward-thinking brands are turning to 'digital clienteling,' offering personalised, scalable conversations.

Clienteling is a customer service technique used by brands to create long-term relationships based on customer buying preferences. While clienteling is commonly associated with the luxury sector, its usage is increasing amongst other sectors.

Digital clienteling done right can increase conversion and loyalty rates, reduce the number of abandoned carts, and improve efficiency in core processes like shipping and returned packages, despite the pandemic.

But which channel is most suited to creating and supporting such customer conversations in a post-COVID-19 world?

Turns outs the answer is smartphone-based chat apps—and specifically, WhatsApp and Viber.

According to Campaign Monitor, traditional digital channels are struggling: only 20% of emails are opened compared to 98% of all mobile messages. With messaging applications booming among millennials and Generation Z it's no wonder using WhatsApp as a primary engagement channel is set to become essential for future-facing brands.

SECTORS ACING DIGITAL CLIENTELING
Banking
The retail banking sector is going through seismic change, its use of fintech moving consumers away from making in-branch visits or relying on call centres and accessing banking services online.

While there were signs that customer acceptance of digitization was beginning to plateau, the pandemic has acted as a significant catalyst for digital adoption because of global lockdowns.

Messaging applications like WhatsApp and Viber are already transforming the customer experience in banking, with major banks worldwide leveraging them to forge deeper relations with their customers. Here's how:

- Covering the basics – Messaging applications are now used to offer a range of essential banking services that customers rely on day in, day out.

For instance, First Ukrainian International Bank and Nepal-based Sunrise Bank allow their customers to use messaging platforms to check account balances, receive mini-statements, request information about nearby ATM locations, view current interest rates on loans/account types, display bank opening hours and locations and more.

- Boosting customer happiness – As well as providing simple services, banks are also using 'to connect more deeply with customers via two-way comms. For instance, VTB Bank in Belarus switched to Viber Business Messages to reduce paper-based comms, which in turn drove up engagement rates.

By choosing to deliver promotions, services, and selected customer services using the platform, the bank has seen half of its customers use Viber to engage in two-way conversations with them. Subsequently, this has led to complaint levels falling by 80% as customers enjoyed more personalized experiences and faster resolutions to issues.

- Upselling services – Viber Business Messages are proving to be beneficial for bottom lines too. For instance, NLB Banka AD Podgorica serves Southeast Europe and turned to Viber to push out promotional campaigns (this is because Viber allows direct marketing messaging unlike its rival WhatsApp Business). This saw NLB's sales of select products increase by up to 15%, and a 30% conversion rate for an 'arrange a meeting' offer.

Sports

What underpins any successful sports club is its fans: that 'tribe' of allegiance-sharing devotees who are 100% committed to their team. In the COVID-19 era, tournaments are currently being held without spectators, so clubs must also find new ways to fire up fans' passions with social distancing policies in place.

From offering exclusive game images and player interviews through to managing subscriptions and promoting ticket offers, forward-thinking sports clubs are leveraging messaging platforms with often game-changing results.

- Customer Service & Engagement – Acting as information hubs, chat apps offer fans a more convenient, faster way to access key club services. Think membership applications, season tickets, game results with both WhatsApp Business and Viber Business Messages able to deliver a diverse range of information as well as manage exchanges frictionlessly.
- Marketing & Sales – The adoption of messaging applications by sports clubs has seen one-way marketing messaging being shown the red card too, replaced with more personalized, targeted 'conversations' that increase conversion rates and shorten sales cycles. WhatsApp click-to-chat buttons deployed in Facebook and Instagram ads that, when clicked on, allow fans to start chatting with a live agent or virtual assistant right away are the latest trend in this space.
- Pushing brand messaging further – To help spread branding beyond fanbases, clubs are offering digital sticker sets for use in messaging platform conversations. For instance, FC Barcelona gifted fans an exclusive downloadable club sticker pack via Viber Business Messages.

Telco

Constant customer churn is the bane of telcos with some now turning to 'proactive customer conversations' to address the notoriously challenging issue. Here's how telcos can navigate through the retention landscape successfully:

- Personalisation – Identifying high churn risk customers and their individual needs should be at the top of telco's priorities. Knowing how different customers will respond to varying levels of retention is the key to telco brands being more proactive or reactive when they engage with their customers. Customers will be more open to revealing their needs and feedback on WhatsApp because of its familiarity.
- Timeliness – Studies show that conventional loyalty programs designed to bring back old customers are no longer effective. With WhatsApp Business, it's simple to monitor and report customer conversation for risk analysis.
- Seamless customer experience – Telcos can make their customer's journey effortless by interacting with them on their preferred channel. Over 2 billion people use WhatsApp daily, so it has become one of the preferred customer communications channels. ◼

Jean Shin is Director Strategy and Content, tyntec

RCS: new kid on the conversational block

While there is a growing move towards conversational commerce through existing messaging channels such as WhatsApp, the new kid on the block, RCS, is also looking for a slice of that pie. **Paul Skeldon** takes a look at what it has to offer

Rich Communications Service (RCS), Google's stab at creating the next generation of text messaging – and a player in the growing game of interactive business messaging services – is ideally positioned to tap into the trend for conversational commerce.

According to research by Mobilesquared, in 2021 RCS is likely to be the world's biggest business messaging platform.

"As of the end of 2018, there were 203 million [RCS users] globally and, by the end of our forecast period in 2023, there will be 2.8 billion RCS users. That is exponential growth," says Mobilesquared's chief analyst Nick Lane.

"So in mid-2019, in terms of global reach, RCS is comparable with the likes of Skype, LINE, Kakao Talk. At this point just 0.3% of total smartphone users were on RCS. By the end of 2019, there will be 790 million RCS P2P users, at which point RCS has caught up with Tencent's QQ. By the end of 2019, 14.8% of total smartphone users were on RCS."

But 2020 will be a key year for RCS in terms of scale, believes Lane. "Brands take note," he says. "Not only will it reach 1 billion users, but by the end of the year there will be 1.47 billion users and the channel is now bigger than Facebook Messenger, WeChat, and Viber, and is on a par with WhatsApp."

In 2021, RCS will officially become the world's biggest business messaging platform, Lane declares, with more than 2 billion users, accounting for 50% of total smartphone users.

WHY RCS HAS A BRIGHT FUTURE

So what will drive this? RCS is a rich format, which lends itself to interactive messaging, but is also features a number of other facets baked in that are designed to make it what business want to use to contact consumers.

It offers verified sender status, can handle QR codes embedded in messages. Can carry branding, looks good with full rich media, allows numerous actions to be added and, perhaps above all else, it comes with very rich metrics.

Perhaps its most defining feature – and where it differs from WhatsApp – is that it doesn't require the user to install an sort of special app to make it work. It will just work on sophisticated enough handsets.

This taps into one of RCS's unique appeals: it is to the end user just text messaging with carousel cards and more richness. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger may well go out of style, but SMS has been with us for 30 years and counting.

Another surprising area that RCS can lead businesses into is RCS enabling landlines. RCS uses the service provider to deliver the message, so the landline connection can be used to delivery. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger require an internet connection, so the message isn't always going to get through.

According to John Laucer, CEO of Zipwhip, a US based messaging provider, "Quite often the consumer wants to interact with an individual of the business, whether it's their sales rep at a car dealership, as opposed to just interacting with the car dealership or even with just the automotive brand itself. And the way to achieve an individual communication with somebody of the business is through phone numbers."

BRANDS TAP IN

For these reasons brands are keen to tap into RCS. Research again by Mobilesquared in 2019 found that whilst only 5.7% of brands and businesses said they would launch RCS business messaging (RBM) immediately, this number is set to increase to a majority of 65.8% three years after the launch of RBM – with content sharing, branded experiences and 1-2-1 chat being the main drivers.

Mobilesquared chief data analyst, Gavin Patterson, said: "Although a number of questions remain about specific pricing models, the RCS business messaging platform has almost universally proven to show an increase in consumer opt-ins, click-through rates, satisfaction, engagement and conversion for brands and businesses."

Patterson adds: "This, coupled with the expected increase in messaging volumes due to the use of chat sessions which encourage a conversational flow between brand and customer, means that the entire ecosystem – from mobile operator to aggregator, brand and consumer – can benefit from RBM," he said.

HOW MGAGE IS TAPPING INTO RCS

mGage, a global mobile messaging provider, has launched the first solution to bring mobile payments within the RCS channel.

This move creates a seamless experience for customers, while delivering a strong ROI for brands. By leveraging the high engagement rates of RCS and the increased conversion rates of mobile payments it provides a ground-breaking solution within one platform.

"With this ground-breaking solution, RCS is now a truly conversational commerce channel that brings innovative and new ways for brands to monetise their services and allow for purchases to be made seamlessly within the RCS messaging app," says Nick Millward, VP Europe at mGage. "By working closely with UK MNOs and Regulators, charities and enterprises alike now have access to a game-changing solution that will enable them to offer fast and seamless payment journeys for additional services without compromising on the customer experience."

By bringing together RCS and Mobile Payments, end-users are now able to purchase on-demand subscription services, make charitable donations and enter competitions in a seamless and quick way. With in-built brand verification within RCS channels, consumers also have peace of mind knowing who the message is from. ◼

Delivering the last mile of UX

Advanced messaging combined with cloud technologies gives businesses a competitive advantage when communicating with customers. **Nobuhara Masatoshi** explains

By mid-2020, it is estimated that approximately 3.5 billion people around the world were using a smartphone, which equates to roughly 45% of the world's population. Furthermore, it is estimated that by the year 2025, 72% of all internet users will solely use smartphones to access the web.

A primary driver of mobile technology remains its text message functionality. In the US alone, it is estimated that 76% of consumers are actively receiving some sort of text messages from businesses. What's more, 68% of companies expect advanced mobile messaging apps to play a highly important role in online consumer marketing within five years.

The leading businesses of today and tomorrow will go beyond just a series of messaging apps. The true leaders will leverage an advanced messaging offering through a complete end-to-end digital transformation strategy that is cloud-based with a fully customisable platform.

THE DAWN OF 'ADVANCED MESSAGING'

What is 'advanced messaging', how is it different from the traditional SMS text messaging we've grown to use on a daily basis, and how will it change the way businesses connect, engage and communicate with their customers?

Advanced messaging, also known as 'omnichannel messaging', creates a more mobile-centric engagement opportunities for businesses. Messaging providers are increasingly offering multiple communication channels, including apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, WeChat, along with the integration through traditional email. Through Rich Communications Services (RCS), a specific messaging technology, businesses can connect with consumers like never before.

HOW CAN ADVANCED MESSAGING BENEFIT BUSINESSES?

Consider your average hotel in this scenario. With traditional SMS text messaging, the hotel was limited to simply texting a booking confirmation to a guest for a future stay.

With advanced messaging and RCS, the same hotel can do so much more. As guests pull into the hotel's vicinity, they could receive a message on their smartphone device with check-in instructions. They could receive rich media images of their chosen room and also receive images and details of additional upgraded rooms if they'd be interested. They may also receive downloadable coupons to the hotel's restaurants, or nearby restaurants that engage in co-marketing opportunities.

With advanced messaging, businesses such as hotels have a plethora of opportunities to connect, engage and communicate. However, many businesses are also realizing that advanced messaging is still

somewhat limited unless they have the ability to leverage the cloud and digital platform in order to fully customize their messaging experience.

CLOUD TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

In order to achieve a fully advanced messaging offering for their customers, businesses must first embrace a digital transformation strategy that involves moving their data and communications infrastructure to the cloud.

Large enterprises and mid-level companies in sectors such as financial, customer service, insurance, hospitality, and travel are all seeking these types of advanced messaging opportunities through digital transformation. This omnichannel service is built

on their ability to find the right partner to provide data center and network services in order to move to the cloud so they can ultimately provide a more engaging level of communication services and experiences, such as through the Internet of Things (IoT).

Businesses that have access to the right digital platform, provisioned hybrid (private/public) cloud infrastructure through a Windows environment and API connection will be in prime position to offer this advanced messaging engagement to their customers.

In order to see the full benefits of this business strategy, these organizations will need to combine an end-to-end digital transformation strategy, a customer experience platform, network services, systems integration, cloud services along

with advanced messaging. This way, organizations can leverage an API to provision their own services on top of the communications platform to truly extend their omnichannel messaging in front of end-user customers.

THE FUTURE AND GROWTH OF BUSINESS MESSAGING

Today's omnichannel messaging offerings are also known as Application-to-Person (A2P), and this market is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.

According to Ovum's Mobile Messaging Traffic and Revenue Forecast: 2017-22, global revenues from A2P will exceed revenues from person-to-person (P2P) SMS by 2022, totaling $43 billion. Furthermore, it is estimated there will be

approximately 3.5 trillion A2P messages delivered by 2023, a 40% growth rate from 2.5 trillion delivered in 2019. The GSMA estimates the market for RCS will be worth $74 billion by the end of 2021.

Businesses in every industry are looking for new ways to connect, engage and communicate with their customers, especially via mobile and smartphone devices. With an advanced messaging offering through a complete end-to-end digital transformation strategy that is cloud-based with a fully customizable platform, businesses can ensure they will have a significant competitive advantage for years to come. ◨

Nobuhara Masatoshi is CEO of KDDI America www.KDDIAmessaging.com

FROM THE EDITOR

Telemedia8.1 and the many reasons to talk telemedia

The World Telemedia Marbella event may be postponed due to coronavirus, but that doesn't mean that the industry can't get together and discuss, learn and enjoy each other's company.

Ladies and gentleman, I give you Telemedia8.1. While many events have gone digital, Telemedia8.1 is doing things differently. It is building a library of content – presentations, panel discussions, webinars and more (I am keen to get some sort of quiz going or even a virtual drink up) – that rather than requiring you to tune in at a particular time, let's you watch what you want, when you want. It will be constantly updated through October, November and December, so you can keep coming back.

In fact, it is such as good idea that I for one want it to operate all year round and to augment and add to live events such as World Telemedia Marbella and even another #unofficialMWC as things get back to normal.

The reason I say this is because there has never been a better time to be involved in telemedia. Carrier billing is starting to gain ground as a mainstream digital payment tool for a raft of services from games to apps stores to Fishing TV channels.

International Premium Rates (IPRN) is similarly finding a micropayments niche in entertainment and value-added service billing worldwide.

Messaging and engagement have boomed over lockdown, with SMS garnering some competition from RCS and OTT messaging – all of which present some interesting opportunities.

Cyber security is also on the menu, with again all those stuck at home people a prime target for nefarious actions.

All of this – and more, much more – is set to be discussed, presented, debated and mulled over on Telemedia8.1. Starting opposite on page 15 we preview some of my Editor's picks, but stay tuned for more as it grows and evolves into a really useful telemedia resource.
www.telemediaonline.co.uk
@telemediaTweets

Paul Skeldon. editor

telemedia 8.1
Where mCommerce Clicks

World Telemedia will be back in Marbella 18-21 May 2021, but until then things aren't standing still. With lockdown and the pandemic making it difficult to stage any live events, the telemedia team has worked out how to bring the same levels of interaction and knowledge sharing to our community – but online, and in the process they may just have reinvented the whole physical/digital show model in the process!

Telemedia8.1 is a digital initiative aimed at delivering quality thought-leadership and knowledge content to the entire telemedia/mCommerce audience in the absence of face to face opportunities. But it goes much further than that; Telemedia8.1 gets over the one thing that many event organisers have simply overlooked – timing is everything.

Instead of live broadcasting conference content, Telemedia8.1 is creating a library of on demand content across October, November and December – putting it up daily and letting the audience tap in whenever they want to.

Moreover, the content library will continue to grow. Why stop it in December? In fact, why stop at all? The Telemedia8.1 resource will be a permanent fixture and looks set to become the go to place for content around the markets that telemedia serve.

It will also be an integral part of future live Telemedia shows, becoming the ultimate interactive show guide that complements and actually contributes to the effectiveness of time spent at live events.

The exhibitor, attendee and speakers lists are all searchable through a set of filters, so that anyone looking to find anyone who's anyone in a particular field can do so easily and instantly connect, discuss, learn and do business.

What a great idea, right? So what are we looking at: what are the highlights that are up at the moment for you to tune into and what is coming in the months ahead?

Conference tracks

TRACK 1: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
Covering all the essential issues and will help you create a robust commercial platform to secure your existing business and gear up to capitalise on future commercial opportunities:

- CRM & The Cost of Complaints
- Customer Flows Legal Issues
- Regulation
- Performance Marketing Issues
- MNO & Affiliates
- Refunds & Debt Recovery
- Managing Global Advertising

TRACK 2: SECURITY & FRAUD
In the current climate, the focus on digital commerce has never been greater but as businesses increase their digital exposure, they become far more vulnerable to digital threats. Protect your business and secure future partnerships with right fraud prevention strategy.

- Compliance
- Fraud Detection
- Cyber Security
- Risk Management
- Ad Monitoring
- Beating Hackers, Hijackers & FAS

TRACK 3 - BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
Focus on strategies for growth and analysis of the vertical market sectors that will respond best to the continued advances our industry is making with innovate mobile content, payment and engagement solutions.

- DCB & VAS Market Research/Data
- New Verticals
- VAS, Content & Apps
- Retail & E-Money
- Messaging Opportunities
- Ticketing, Vouchers & Couponing
- 5G & The Consumer
- New Markets for Voice

TRACK 4 - COUNTRY UPDATES
Hosted by an incumbent billing gateway, aggregator, SPs and/or network operator, these sessions offer the invaluable local knowledge, expertise and commercial insight needed to enter over 20 featured markets.

- Market Overview
- Latest News
- Top Services
- Major Content Providers
- Billing & Subscription Options
- Carrier & Regulator Rules

www.telemedia8point1.com

EDITOR'S PICK

THE POWER OF SOCIAL COMPETITIVE GAMING AND ESPORTS

Gaming is shifting to being a competitive social experience on mobile and is creating new genres of esports services. 5G will only enhance this. Simon Buckingham from Nonvoice outlines what this means for the market and how it can generate revenues.

GET GOING: NEW MARKETS, SERVICES AND CONTENT

Elson Sutanto from Juniper Research explores the existing DCB market and outlines some of the new and emerging content types, services and geographies where the technology is taking off – and where is set to hot up next.

CARRIER BILLING FOR GAMBLING

One of the top potential markets for carrier billing, gambling is ripe to get to grips with this payment tool to help onboard millions of new players. Here our panel of experts from Telemedia magazine, DIMOCO Carrier Billing and Melodi Media outline the market opportunity and discuss how to make DCB work for gambling services.

BUILDING YOUR IPRN BUSINESS FOR THE FUTURE

International Premium Rate Numbers (IPRN) is a billing tool that still underpins a range of crucial customer services worldwide.

Josef Bruckschloegl from Kwak Telecom outlines the market today and what the new opportunities for voice and SMS are worldwide.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT HIGHLIGHTS

ENTICING AUDIENCES WITH MOBILE INTERACTIVITY

What does your consumer really want? Joel Stern, Global Radio, and Joanna Cox, aimm, discuss creating relevance, building trust, optimising engagement and communicating through billing in this fascinating Q&A.

NEW ENGAGEMENT AND REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES IN MEDIA

New opportunities have emerged as traditional media has embraced mobile, from podcasts and newsletters through to coupons and ecommerce, Mark Challinor explores what the opportunities are.

BUSINESS MESSAGING TRAFFIC & DEVELOPMENT 2021

The messaging industry has changed dramatically due to wide- spread adoption of OTT solutions for short business communications. This has demanded new methods, strategies, behaviour and. In this session Andreas Constantinides Head of Messaging & Marketing Consultancy Network, "morethan160" examines market trends and considers changing consumer habits to reveal the future of messaging and its impact on the entire messaging ecosystem.

CARRIER COMMUNITY FOR THE GREATER GOOD

There is more to DCB and telecoms than just making money: it can also be a power for great change. Here John BaRoss,
  Founder & President, FINCCLUDE Inc, outlines the social impact & goodwill opportunities, the rise of mobile financial services, relief aid donations in context of the Humanitarian Connectivity Charter.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

P2A BUSINESS MESSAGING
Merging business messaging with AI is creating whole new ways to interact with consumers. Dario Betti from the Mobile Ecosystem Forum (MEF) outlines what these application to person (A2P) opportunities are, including how to make the best use of everything from AI powered SMS to chatbots.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN CONSUMER CONFIDENCE AND SIMPLICITY OF TRADING
What Services do Consumers Want and how to launch compliant services quickly have to be in perfect balance when launching and running telemedia services. Here Joanna Cox, GM, aimm, and Jonny Brown, Owner, SB7 MOBILE discuss everything from managing payment flows in challenging regulatory times to balancing customer care whilst maximising revenues.

HOW TO USE MODERATION EFFECTIVELY
New Media Services outline how moderation can be a power for good – protecting the consumer and making your business better.

COUNTRY UPDATES

A country by country analysis of markets from experts in each country covering:

Iraq & Bahrain – Kevin Drayne, SLA Digital

Egypt – Hassan Shubbar, Empello

UK – Joanna Cox and Neil Johnson, AIMM

UK - Kevin Dawson, Dynamic Mobile Billing

Bangladesh & Malaysia – Craig Richard, Apigate

Ivory Coast, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Senegal & Guinea – Nicolas Metay, Digital Virgo

Belgium – Ghofran El Amin, Empello

Saudi Arabia – Ashraf Shrouf, 3Anet

Turkey – Ezgi Aygan, Empello

FOR MORE UPDATES
More are to be added, to see the latest go to: www.telemedia8point1.com/country-updates

COMING SOON...

TAKING MOBILE GAMES TO THE NEXT LEVEL
How blockchain, cryptocurrencies and mobile gaming are coming together to create some mind-blowing games, including some interesting spin-offs around such massive TV brands as Dr Who. Hear from John Kavanagh from BBC Studios and Tony Pearce from Reality Clash about how this works.

HOW DO YOU HARNESS THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC TO INCREASE REVENUES FOR DCB / VAS SERVICES?
Carrier billing has come into its own over the lockdown and that will continue across the post-lockdown world. Here, in association with Seriously Fresh Media, we find out what the hot services using DCB are going to be.

RCS IN THE SPOTLIGHT
RCS is slowly gaining ground and 2021 could see it become mainstream. So what will that look like and what are the opportunities? Who better to tell you than RCS expert Nick Lane from Mobilesquared.

GAMING SUBSCRIPTIONS SERVICES: CREATING VALUE FOR MONEY
Joe Arkley, Melodi Media, outlines what makes a game popular, how to tap into that to build a subscription service and how to make that fly for end users.

www.telemedia8point1.com

Crime of the century

Rick McElroy outlines just how rampant cybercrime has become during the pandemic and what all industry players need to do about it

The global health crisis has accelerated the digital transformation initiatives of many organisations. Unfortunately, the urgency associated with rolling out these plans has meant an increase in the risk of cyberattacks. With a mass shift to establish remote workforces, organisations have inadvertently relaxed security or misconfigured devices. The distributed workforce has introduced changes for security professionals as well, who are now on the frontlines of enabling and securing newly distributed workforces.

These gaps in traditional cyber defences, combined with changing working patterns and employee behaviour, have created a larger surface area for cyberattacks which make it more difficult to spot such attacks. And amid the disruption, COVID-19 has exposed the UK to an unprecedented level of cyberattacks.

As part of the VMware Carbon Black Global Threat Report Series, we discovered that CO-VID-19 has opened the door for a surge in cyber incidents. Almost every UK business (99 percent) surveyed suffered at least one security breach in the last 12 months. Ninety-eight percent of the CIOs, CTOs and CISOs also confirmed that attack volumes increased in the last 12 months. More than nine out of 10 noted the increase in attacks were related to employees working from home during COVID-19 stay at home orders.

FENDING SOPHISTICATED CYBERATTACKS

It's not just the frequency of attacks that is concerning – it's the growing sophistication of attacks. For example, cybercriminals are exploiting the crisis to launch a wave of 'fearware' attacks. These often take the form of phishing attacks or email fraud that seek to exploit users' concerns surrounding COVID-19. In fact, 93 percent of UK respondents reported being targeted by COVID-19-related malware.

It is also worth pointing out other major threats: For example, OS vulnerabilities are the leading cause of breaches in 2020 our research found. However, it also highlighted that island-hopping and third-party application attacks still cause a disproportionate percentage of breaches.

As both a cause and a consequence, the dark web is thriving during COVID-19, with the commoditisation of malware making more sophisticated attack techniques available to a growing number of cybercriminals. Common commodity malware like ransomware is starting to exhibit sophisticated behaviours, executing more destructive attacks, performing credential harvesting and making lateral movements once it breaches a system.

We are also seeing more secondary extortion plots, with attackers causing more damage

The mobile spike

The total number of mobile applications identified as malicious in the first quarter of 2020 doubled compared to the first quarter of 2019.

So says data from Secure-D, Upstream's full stack anti-fraud platform, covering 31 mobile operators in 20 countries at the beginning of 2020. In Q1 the security platform detected more than 29,000 malicious apps versus just over 14,500 during the same quarter of last year.

The first quarter also saw a dramatic 55% spike in the number of fraudulent mobile transactions and an increase in the number of malware infected mobile devices.

The data demonstrates that alarmingly, nine of the 10 top malicious apps of 2020 for the quarter are – or were at some point – available on Google Play, meaning they have passed the security checks in place.

For the full year 2019 the proportion of the top 100 malicious apps available on Google Play stood at 30%, according to Secure-D' proprietary data for the year.

With lockdowns in effect in most parts of the world for a good part of the quarter, this indicates that fraudsters have been targeting applications that people download as they look to pass the time and entertain themselves, unable to socialize and venture outdoors.

Geoffrey Cleaves, Head of Secure-D at Upstream, explains: "With the majority of the world having shifted indoors, there were some darker forces acting to make a profit from the lockdown situation. At Secure-D, we've seen a sharp increase in bad actors publishing "leisure" apps on the Google Play Store, which trick users into subscribing for premium services."

Fraudsters tend to target Android handsets specifically because the operating system is easier to work with, with a host of unofficial places to visit and download apps. In markets like Brazil, a large proportion of consumers use prepaid credit to purchase digital services, enabling bad actors to subscribe users to services without their knowledge.

The most troublesome app to date in 2020 is Snaptube, a video downloader app that has been downloaded more than 40 million times worldwide. In 2019, Upstream's Secure-D platform logged 70 million fraudulent transactions through the same app – more than half of them in Brazil.

Furthermore, in the first quarter of 2020, Upstream's security platform processed more than 326 million mobile transactions and blocked almost 290 million, having identified 89% of total transactions as fraudulent. The data highlights a dramatic spike in the number of global transactions blocked as fraudulent, up 55% from the previous year, when 186 million were blocked out of the 208 million transactions processed.

It is unknown at this stage how the COVID-19 pandemic will shape 2020 figures, but the impact is likely to be significant. Cleaves explains: "Being in lockdown means prepaid customers will find it difficult to get out the front door to top up their data bundles. In the meantime, malware could be eating into those data bundles. I suspect we may see a drop in mobile internet traffic, and successful billing attempts, in predominantly prepaid developing markets while lockdowns are in force".

once they gain access to an organisation or individual's data. As seen with the increase in island-hopping and third-party application attacks, adversaries have moved from burglary, to home invasion, to digital squatting.

GREATER COLLABORATION

So, what can organisations do to protect their infrastructure, data and employees in this heightened threat landscape? Most are responding by directing their budgets towards security solutions with more than 99 percent of respondents planning to increase cyber defence spending in the coming year. The good news is that organisations are now starting to recognise the value of threat hunting to help identify malicious actors.

As organisations increase spending, they must also consider their security strategies. Today, many UK organisations are using a variety of different security technologies resulting in siloed, hard-to-manage environments that play into attackers' hands. Evidence shows that attackers have the upper hand when security is not an intrinsic feature of the environment. As the cyber threat landscape reaches saturation, it is time for rationalisation, strategic thinking, and clarity over security deployment.

The report also found that an inability to institute multifactor authentication is one of the biggest threats that businesses face with security right now. Multifactor authentication is an integral part of a security posture to stop traditional credential harvesting methods and should be extended as far as possible.

The unexpected disruption of COVID-19 has seen the rise of global threats. In unprecedented times, organisations must focus on proactive threat hunting to detect attacks before they have a chance to cause catastrophic damage, not just here in the UK but on a global scale. ◩

Rick McElroy, Cybersecurity Strategist, VMware Carbon Black

Game on
How DCB can boost mobile gaming

Lockdown has reshaped how people entertain themselves and they have increasingly turned to their mobiles. This has been a boon to the already booming gaming sector – and it has also revamped DCBs role. **Paul Skeldon** reports

Gaming got a boost from mobile, a technology that radically reshaped the gaming market back in the early 2010s. Now mobile gaming has been given a massive new boost from the lockdown – with more people than ever picking up their smartphones to find entertainment and solice in these dark times.

Research by Juniper Research suggests that 'video gaming' will exceed $200 billion in value in 2023; growing from an expected $155 billion in 2020.

Mobile and cloud gaming, it says, will lead this growth as the market shifts further towards recurring revenue and purchase revenue declines by 5% over the coming years.

This has been a mixed blessing for the gam-ing industry, but it has been a massive fillip for the telemedia sector, seeing new developments in carrier billing as a way to pay for immediate access to games, as well as seeing the beginnings of a revolution in how blockchain and cryptocurrencies are also used around gaming services.

So what gives?

DCB AND GAMING

The gaming industry faces a dilemma. On the one hand, more people than ever are playing. On the other hand, however, most of them are looking at free-to-play (F2P) gaming to get their hit.

For games companies this means that they have to put in a lot of work to get games that stand out in a very competitive market, but their return is low – mainly funded by ads.

The alternative is to look at how to get people to sign up to play. Indeed, Juniper's research sees subscription gaming on mobile as the only real driver of gaming revenue growth right now.

"Thanks to gamers signing up to subscription services like EA Access, Google Stadia and Xbox Gamepass and buying fewer standalone games, only mobile games will see a net increase in games installs between 2020 and 2023," says research co-author James Moar.

Driving much of this is having a quick and easy way for consumers to pay to play, or better still pay to subscribe. And in many regions, direct carrier billing (DCB) is starting to fill that gap.

EPIC GAMES' SUCCESS

The video game and software developer and publisher Epic Games has integrated direct carrier billing(DCB) to collect payments for for Fortnite Battle Passes, game purchases in the Epic Games Store and other Epic Games content.

The first country where carrier bill-ing has been launched is Spain. Epic Games and Fortumo are working together to expand carrier billing to additional countries and carriers in the upcoming months.

"Epic Games has created an ecosystem for game developers and gamers that is high quality, engaging and fair. We are proud to be working with them and supporting both Epic Games and their partners in accelerating revenue and user growth through telco partnerships," says Andrea Boetti, VP of Global Business Development at Fortumo.

Fortumo and Epic Games collaborated to create the business case for carrier billing, with Fortumo helping to identify suitable mobile operators who would match the mapped requirements. This was done to create a roadmap of carriers that would commercially and technically match the publisher's complex offering, which combines the sale of its own in-game content, third party content and game development tools.

Through Fortumo's platform, Epic Games achieved scalability and a faster time to market for the payment method. Rather than integrating and launching each mobile operator separately, using Fortumo enables Epic Games to launch many carriers through one integration.

Fortumo will be working with carriers who have in place a modern direct carrier billing infrastructure to provide a great user experience to gamers. This requires carriers to provide advanced features for carrier billing such as dynamic pricing, token-based charging and automated refunds.

Carrier billing is estimated to account for 14% of all digital gaming transactions in Western Europe. This makes it the third most popular payment method for gaming in the region after credit cards and digital wallets.

The popularity of carrier bill-

ing in Western Europe results from its user-friendliness: transactions do not require users to log in to any additional accounts or enter personal information about themselves. Instead, payments are confirmed by using their mobile phone number and a 2-step verification process.

The simpler checkout flows coupled with consumer privacy are also the primary reason why digital content merchants see better conversion from carrier billing compared to other online payment methods.

Over the last 4 years, Fortumo has seen an annual growth of 87% in transaction volume from Western Europe. In parallel, average revenue per user (ARPU) and average transaction values have continued to increase. "The numbers in Europe reflect a clear trend: the adoption of

carrier billing continues to grow, digital content merchants value

carrier billing and are becoming increasingly better at utilizing

it to maximize their revenue," explains Andrea Boetti. ⬛

China's gaming syndrome

If you want to see what mobile gaming can look like, you need to head East. Recent years have witnessed a surge in the Chinese mobile games' revenue. In 2017, the market hit $14.9 billion, according to Statista. By 2019 this had $18 billion. Statistics show the market value is expected to jump to around $21 billion in 2020, growing 16.5% year-on-year.

Since 2017, the profit in the Chinese mobile games segment has jumped by 50%.

A Rakuten Insight survey conducted in March this year revealed that 82% of Chinese gamers use mobile phones for playing online games, making it the most popular device for gaming in the country. PC is the second most-popular device, with 59% of respondents using it for gaming. Nintendo Switch and Xbox consoles follow, with 9% and 4%, respectively.

The same survey revealed that one-third of Chinese gamers play online games daily.

Another 33% of those asked play online games between three to six days per week. Another 18% of Chinese gamers played online games once or twice a week.

The rapid growth of the entire Chinese mobile gaming market has been followed by the surge in the number of people playing mobile games. In 2017, China had nearly 381 million mobile gamers. In the next two years, this number increased to 450.7 million.

Statista data reveals that the number of users in the Chinese mobile games segment is set to jump over 517 million in 2020, growing 14.8% year-on-year.

Millennials (people between 25 and 35) and Gen X (between 35 and 44) represent the major user groups, with 40.5% and 22.7% share, respectively. By 2023, the total number of people playing mobile games in China is expected to jump over 586 million.

Beyond the impulse purchase: streamlining subscriptions

The adoption of direct carrier billing (DCB) is crucial for brands looking to meet the growing demand for subscription-based content – bypassing card payments to open-up subscription services to new audiences and markets, while also giving flexibility to increasingly vigilant consumers. **James Macfarlane** explains

Thanks to the ease and speed of adding purchases directly to phone bills, impulse buys will always be a key part of carrier billing's remit – and have been key in introducing direct to bill payment to the mass market.

However, as the subscriptions market matures, customers are beginning to expect both a suite of payment options, and improved standards when it comes to transparency, communication and accountability.

Big brands are beginning to catch on to the vast potential for DCB to help meet customer expectations when it comes to making recurring payments.

MAXIMISING CONSUMER CHOICE

Ultimately, today's consumers expect choice and will drive their purchase behaviour around brands that give them this. Whether this relates to choice of content, phone contracts or payment options, the largest and most successful brands in the world recognise this.

While purchase via debit or credit card will continue to be the favoured payment option of many people, optimising customer journeys means catering to a range of payment preferences, especially when it comes to subscriptions. Some consumers will always choose the traditional options, but we are seeing a new breed of buyer emerge, those who wish to take advantage of the accessibility, convenience and security benefits of DCB.

Customers may want to add purchases directly to their phone bill either on an ad hoc basis – when they do not have their card on them, or are paying on the go. But DCB is also proving itself as the go-to hassle-free option – eliminating clunky sign-up processes and avoiding the need to give personal details to the supplier.

Offering a payment method that circumvents credit cards becomes even more important in emerging markets, where consumers are more likely to own a phone than to have a bank account. In the African continent, where an estimated 30% of the adult population are unbanked, the DCB option opens up branded content to customers who might not otherwise have had access.

So when big players like Google Play – which has added 20 more carrier billing partnerships over the past year – adopt carrier billing, customer experience is top priority, with the business is recognising that an ever-expanding, international user base has a wider variety of needs. For Google, DCB sits alongside

Turning subscriptions into a platform-as-a-service

Subscriptions services are a boon to MNOs and creating the right platform and billing combination to maximise this has led to the creation of platform-as-a-service (PaaS) technologies to service these demands.

For example, Using Centili Fusion, MNOs can integrate a variety of digital services into their prepaid or postpaid plans. The platform allows them to easily incorporate add-ons such as social media apps, mobile gaming, e-learning and VOD services, into a bespoke package through Centili's existing partnerships with merchants worldwide.

This enables operators to deliver value-add subscriptions to their customers instantly, without having to navigate the technical issues of integration.

The benefit is increased customer engagement and loyalty, via a platform that is managed as a complete end-to-end offering, taking the hassle out of delivering bundled mobile subscriptions.

Due to Centili's global presence this can be done in any region across the world, and in addition to the technical platform, it also takes care of the legal and regulatory challenges of introducing digital services to new markets. By blending business and process consultancy services with the easy to use PaaS, and allows merchants to quickly enter new regions with minimal friction, cutting through the red tape that typically slows down the process.

Centili has been trialling the platform throughout 2020 and has seen huge successes when it comes to customer engagement. For example, high-end apps offered as a value-added service by mobile network operators in North Africa and South-East Asia offered a highly effective acquisition strategy with a 60% retention rate. This not only gives operators a low cost, low effort way to engage with subscribers, while giving merchants one of the most effective methods of customer acquisition on the market.

Zoran Vasiljev, Group CEO at Centili commented, "One of the biggest barriers to delivering the integrated digital packages that consumers are looking for, is the complexity of combining these services. Centili Fusion completely removes the business, legal and regulatory hassle of bundling digital services into mobile packages, creating an opportunity for operators and merchants alike to engage customers to strengthen their bottom line. We look forward to seeing our MNO and merchant partners alike benefit from the most frictionless method of collaboration in the industry."

e-wallets, UPI in India and new options to pay for mobile purchases using cash in-store – designed to meet a vast range of customer requirements.

Trailblazer brands see an expanded range of payment options as an extension to the increasing number of platforms for consuming content. Look no further than PM Connect's carrier billing solutions for major sporting brands – offering video highlights and commentary, available through direct-to-bill subscription purchase. These aim to complement each brand's wider content offerings – its websites, apps, and over-the-top (OTT) services. More content options work alongside increasingly diverse ways to pay, catering to the ever-changing ways modern consumers like to receive their entertainment.

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY

Alongside wanting more choice, consumers are also wising-up to subscriptions that look to lock them in and are demanding improved communication and opt-out options as a result.

Trusted DCB operators use the ubiquity of SMS – with 90% of texts read within the first three minutes – to their advantage. For example, we send receipts via SMS to subscribers every month, with no fixed-term subscriptions and the option to cancel by texting STOP at any point.

As a result, control of the subscription is handed back to the consumer, incorporating reminders of recurring payments into the day-to-day mobile browsing experience. Strategies like this, alongside

working closely with the Phone-paid Services Authority (PSA), means that carrier billing can offer greater levels of customer control than its card-based counterparts. Contrary to reports in the mainstream media, due to weekly or monthly text updates consumers are actually less likely to sign up to a carrier billing subscription and forget about it than its credit-based counterparts.

Thanks to a combination of ease and accessibility, and a direct and transparent subscriber/provider relationship, DCB is experiencing a boom in popularity as a payment method for subscriptions. PM Connect is seeing an increased number of subscribers through its carrier billing enabled solutions, with these subscribers staying loyal for longer periods of time.

At present, brands have been slow to catch on, with relatively few offering the DCB option. However, with the most established names leading the way, this is set to change. Brands listening their consumer base and looking to adapt to new markets realise that the subscription sector is moving into the next stage of its growth. Carrier billing is necessary to meet the demands of both international audiences and a newly savvy breed of subscribers. ◼

James Macfarlane is Group CEO of UK-based mobile payment provider PM Connect.
Find out more about PM Connect at http://pmconnect.co.uk

Age of chance

Age verification used to be a dirty word in Telemedia, but now the industry is a strong advocate for it across the web – and it can drive demonstrable benefits in many sectors. **Paul Skeldon** investigates

The internet is a dangerous place and protecting kids from its darker side is imperative. But so too is protecting businesses from under-age users, who can see them breaking increasingly-stringent laws governing internet use, as well as potentially racking up huge bills that their parents don't want to pay.

For these reasons, more businesses than ever are turning to Age Verification (AV) and many telemedia companies are getting on board.

Checking the age of users is increasingly a legal obligation. In France, there is now a so-called 'porn ban' in place, echoing much of Europe's stance on making users register to use adult sites. The UK lags behind as the government reneged on its plan to introduce a similar scheme, but it will come.

IMPACT ON BUSINESS

All online businesses that are age-sensitive should embrace AV as it not only helps them meet the law, protect the young and vulnerable and protect their own standing, but it also drives revenues.

While only adolescent boys denied access to tube sites would complain, most of us welcome in principle age verification for web use – the issue is how to do it without revealing anyone's identity.

The way around this is to have an account with an AV provider so that they have your details, so they can unlock the site for you, and the site owners never get to see who you are, only that you are old enough to be there.

Another typical example is AGEify from Upcom. It describes how its system works.

"You register your website, and we add an AGEify protection filter at any step of your customer's journey – home page, specific pages, checkout page, etc. Then whenever your customers try to access one of the protected pages, they can easily unlock it in under five seconds if they already have an AGEify account. If not, they can prove their age with us using one of the multiple supported methods, such as face recognition, document scanning, credit card validation, physical checks, integration with other ID providers."

Part of how AGEify makes this happen is through relationships with other organisations. It co-operates via a mutually fruitful way with a rapidly evolving network of affiliate organizations – including banks, insurance companies, telecom operators etc – in order to verify the actual age of the visitors of a website or a place, without asking or revealing any other personal information.

BOOST TO GAMING

Take a look at the gambling sector. Gaming business, Savvygamblers, has experienced a 40% increase in website visitors following the implementation of fully compliant age verification software.

The company owns two affiliate websites – Bigtimegaming-freeplay.com and Megawaysslotsonline.com. Both aim to drive traffic for the slot provider Big Time Gaming and for slot providers with the Megaways license respectively. Visitors to the sites can try out the providers' games for free.

New regulatory legislation means that even free-to-play games need to ensure robust age verification in the UK. Savvygamblers therefore recognised the need to make its sites fully compliant in order to future-proof its business model. The objective: prevent underage users from accessing the games, whilst maintaining a smooth and straightforward user journey for adult players.

The business brought Age-Checked on board – an online age verification specialist. AgeChecked's system works by requiring users to verify their age using reliable evidence such as a driving license or credit card statements.

Nigel Hall, CEO of Savvygamblers, says: "Our users know that, after having entered their details once, all future visits to the websites will be quick and easy – hence the increase in visitor numbers. It's been a great move for us." ■

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iPRN made easy

There has been a resurgence in the use of iPRN and audiotext during the pandemic – and now one company is making it easier than ever to make it work. **Paul Skeldon** finds out more

International Premium Rate Numbers (IPRN) has made something of a comeback in 2020. Voice traffic generally has had boost from stuck-at-home consumers needing a way to contact brands that they have had some sort of ecommerce dealings with.

There has also been a huge and growing interest in competitions, content, chat, dating, psychic, tarot and many, many content types as the bored and bewildered seek solace and entertainment.

Connecting these services and their traffic to consumers through premium rate is increasingly interesting many established players and newbies alike.

There is no other micropayments tool that can reach the number of people that IPRN can nor with the ease. As with DCB, IPRN is having a moment in the pandemic, as it is increasingly being used to microbill for a huge range of content types and value added services (VAS) that consumers are turning to on their mobiles.

And media players need this revenue too. Many have been forced to look at how to create new revenue streams as traditional advertising dries up. Using microbilling for spin-off services – everything from access to extra content, to peripherals such as all those chat, psychic, advice and help lines – is a way to make that happen.

Media is also increasingly international, so the rise of IPRN as a payment tool chimes nicely with where businesses are increasingly heading themselves.

The challenge lies in how to create a smooth and easy to manage IPRN model. It is a tangled web of an ecosystem involving networks, aggregators, content providers, affiliate markers, media companies and more. The challenge to making IPRN grow further means making it as easy as possible to set up such services. And some companies are already on the case (see box).

Getting that interface right is going to make IPRN even more successful in the years ahead – we just need to get there.

The challenge is how to set up and manage these services easily and effectively

Enter audiotext.com. It has created an IPRN platform that has taken all the great features that developers and content creators have come to know and love and applied them to the setting up and management of audiotext services.

And it is a thing of beauty to behold. As far as telecom dashboards go it is state of the art, with tutorial overlays and the usual degree of analysis and reporting that you would expect – displayed so that it is easy to compare week by week, month, day, year or any specified date.

But these are just cosmetic – if much needed – tweaks to the platform market. Where this really shines is in its ability to seek out the specific routes and payouts that a content provider, aggregator or reseller is looking for for a particular service or campaign.

Say you want to service traffic from Italy and you want a particular payout rate. Plug this into the platform and it will show you what is on offer: which routes, at what payout rates and so on, allowing a business to create bespoke service offerings as they need them.

The platform then lets you manage them and analyse them and keep changing and adjusting them as you need.

The company is looking to service resellers, media and content owners and more, initially targeting those that already 'get it' with IPRN, but eventually looking to expand to new markets as the service takes off.

It is also on the look out for networks and Value Added Services (VAS) partners to help create that perfect ecosystem of suppliers and services to take to market.

Check it out at www.audiotext.com

Driving value added services for voice and mobile

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