Ipsos Insight

American Consumers Show Interest In A Broad Range Of Wireless Applications Spanning Notebook PCs And Handhelds

Barriers to considering new wireless applications are more about device or budget overload than performance concerns

New York, NY, January 18, 2007 — Various new and emerging wireless applications have caught the attention of American consumers, according to recent research conducted by Ipsos Insight. However, many consumers will seriously consider these emerging wireless applications only if they are compelling enough to break through device and communications overload, as well as budgetary constraints. At the same time, consumers appear less concerned that a given wireless application will perform up to expectations.

Ipsos Insight recently surveyed over 1,000 online adults on their awareness, use, and interest regarding a range of specific “wireless device-application” combinations, focusing primarily on notebook PCs and mobile phones. By design, these wireless device-application combinations emphasized newer and emerging features and options.

Respondents were asked whether they had used each of the applications in the last 30 days, and whether they would seriously consider using each in the future. Their “future consideration” was spread fairly broadly across web connectivity, communications, and content applications, and across the PC and mobile device platforms (see Chart 1).

Neither the PC nor the mobile phone dominated consideration of these emerging wireless applications. The most popular options were WiFi web surfing on a notebook PC and emailing or instant messaging on a mobile phone. Also, while future consideration was higher than past-30-day use for all of these fairly new or emerging applications, untapped interest was particularly high for GPS applications on mobile devices.

Says Ipsos Insight SVP Todd Board, “The range of wireless options being considered suggests sustained interest in multiple devices that connect to the web, and potentially to each other. The notion of many consumers flocking to just one converged device is receding steadily, in part due to the ongoing device explosion. More and more, it appears that web connectivity and interoperability of specialized devices is what’s attractive. That said, experimentation around ‘sweet-spot’ or all-in-one feature combinations – like the iPhone that Apple finally confirmed – will continue. And of course, we’ll continue to find distinct segments of consumers who vary in terms of application and platform preferences and combinations.”

Respondents were also asked what they see as barriers to considering specific wireless device-application combinations for which they reported low consideration. The barriers generally clustered around “overload” and lack of perceived need/desire for the application, concerns about costs (both direct and indirect), and uncertainty about whether the benefits would be worth the learning or behavior change involved (see Chart 2).

Says Board, “Tech marketers can choose to view this as good news, bad news, or possibly both. Regardless of the specific technology application, we tend to see these barriers time and time again. There is some sequencing involved – only if I perceive enough of a tangible need or benefit do I bother to learn about the costs involved in acquiring that benefit. Likewise, only if I’ve explored the explicit costs will I bother to assess whether there are any hidden or ‘hassle’ costs I need to factor into my thinking.”

Concludes Board, “What is heartening is the relative absence of what we call ‘performance uncertainty’ barriers or concerns. These are when individual consumers are interested enough in a technology application to take a serious look at it, but question whether it will really perform as advertised. While it will always be tricky to bridge complex technology and mainstream consumer expectations, there seems to be relatively little abject consumer skepticism about these applications.”

"We seem to be gradually pushing back the frontier of the unbelievable – the paradox is that as that occurs, 'application saturation' could become a more acute barrier, and one that happens earlier in the consideration process for many consumers."

Methodology

These national survey research data were collected between November 16 and November 20, 2006, with sample drawn from the Ipsos U.S. Online Panel. Data are based on 1,120 online surveys among a representative sample of U.S. online adults. The survey results can be said to be within ± 2.9 percentage points of what they would have been had the entire U.S. online population been surveyed.

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