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Don't compare Apples and Androids

By Noam Green, Mobixell
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Different mobile devices require different methods of video optimisation.

Apple and Android devices run different operating systems, offer different online stores and play video in different formats and sizes. Furthermore, different devices within each product set have almost as many differences between them – for example, the iPad is not just a big iPhone.

Since video is perceived as a key indicator of an operator's network quality, whether for an Apple or an Android device, or even a new HTC running Windows Phone 7, operators need specific, device-aware optimisation techniques to provide optimal results to the end-user.

The consumption of data across mobile networks is growing at a faster rate than the associated revenues. Mobile operators must find a way to deliver the content their consumers want, at the quality they demand, while still maintaining network efficiency and profitability.

Device-aware content optimisation: Everyone wins

One of the best ways to satisfy both customer and operator needs is to effectively optimise the content for delivery, so that it fits both the capabilities of the network and the devices on which it will be viewed.

Optimisation techniques have come under many guises, but it isn't simply a case of 'one size fits all'. In a market flooded with new devices, new network plans and a hunger for new content, operators need to employ innovative methods to address this dynamic environment in order to provide the best user experience. Optimisation techniques must now be network-aware, behaviour-aware and importantly, device-aware.

Device-aware optimisation assures that optimised content leverages each specific device's capabilities and considers its limitations for the best user experience and highest compression. As smartphones and tablets vary in hardware, processing power and screen size, so do their multimedia capabilities and limitations. Delivering video to users requires the operator to offer an average viewing experience to fit the lowest common denominator, or that the quality of the content is explicitly tuned for each device, providing a maximised viewing experience.

As we have already noted, the iPad is not simply a big iPhone. With a much bigger screen, the iPad provides higher quality video at the same compression rate as the iPhone. Video codecs also vary between the different Apple devices.

If we look at a much less closely controlled OS such as Android, we can see an even greater number of variables to address when optimising data. Receiving different video according to their browsing mode, Android devices with Flash support can access data through YouTube just like a PC. Those without Flash support clearly need different video formats. Obviously these are wildly different formats, requiring a level of adaptation that exceeds the lowest common denominator to provide best results.

With additional video formats (WebM/VP8) and codecs, new ways of playing video (HTML5) and the different delivery methods (HTTP-PD, HLS, Silverlight, etc.), it is clear that video optimisation solutions should expand and adapt to support the ever growing variety of devices.

For the sector to capitalise on the technology that each mobile handset provides, it is crucial to adopt a strategy to master the hundreds of parameters covering each device's capabilities and



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limitations through device-aware optimisation.

If optimisation techniques continue to use the lowest common denominator, video quality will continue to be sub-standard at best. With device-aware optimisation, the optimal quality of experience can be achieved for each device, on any network, and most importantly, for all users.

Noam Green is VP marketing at Mobixell (www.mobixell.com).

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