

## New sites don't just phone it in

By Claude Solnik

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Through his Bethpage firm Core Data Center, Jerry Allocca has hosted, built and marketed Web sites for eight years. But a growing customer segment – those who surf the Web on mobile devices – may be cut off from some of his best efforts.

Some sites just don't work well on cell phones and BlackBerries – text designed for screens of different dimensions is often cut off, for instance – and gradually, a sort of Internet gap is widening.

Allocca, therefore, has found himself riding the wave of a significant change – Web registration and site design specifically targeting the mobile device. The wave lurched forward last month with the debut of the “.mobi” extension, which replaces “.com,” “.net,” “.org” and the like for sites designed specifically for mobile devices. It's the first Web extension exclusive to such devices.

“There's a whole new Internet being created, the mobile Internet,” said Allocca. “There are some heavy players backing this.”

The “.mobi” extension was developed by dotMobi, an Ireland-based joint venture of giants including Google, Microsoft, Vodafone, Samsung, Ericsson and Nokia. General registration of “.mobi” domain names opened Oct 11, and the switch was thrown on the wireless Web this month.

Firms such as BMW have boarded the mobile bandwagon, and dotMobi has already sold more than 200,000 domain names.

According to dotMobi, more people worldwide have access to the Internet through mobile devices than through personal computers. By 2008, researchers expect 1.3 billion people to be connected to the Internet through mobile devices.

Some view the “.mobi” evolution as part of a Web migration toward cell phones, beyond simply checking e-mail or receiving basic weather and news information.

“People are taking their offices with them,” said Peter Goldsmith, president of the Long Island Software and Technology Network. “If you’re at a meeting and you want to look up the information, you want to see their Web site. This is another progression.”

And the demand in the United States (and abroad) for an Internet that works well on mobile devices is only expected to grow. “In emerging markets where fixed-line communications are scarce, analysts predict wireless will be the communication channel of choice,” dotMobi said in a written statement.

As the demand grows, so does the gap between the full-screen Internet and the wireless Web. Traditional, computer-based Internet services only get faster and fancier thanks to better broadband, and mobile surfers are left trying to catch up.

“You want to get the information, but it has to be readable, in a form that makes sense,” said Goldsmith.

Efforts like “.mobi” seek to close the divide, but some still wonder if mobile devices – while certainly making strides insofar as screen sizes and graphics – will ever be able to support the richest Web content.

“I think it’s going to happen, eventually,” said Ken Braun, chief executive of Great River-based online marketing firm Lounge Lizard Worldwide. “I just don’t think it’s there yet.”

And there are other potential problems. The “.mobi” system offers guidelines rather than a single system, and your trip to the mobile Web typically requires 10 strokes to tap out the “.mobi” name – and that’s just the extension. (It’s seven mobile-device strokes to enter “.com.”)

Allocca, who insists “mobile devices are improving,” predicts youth will lead the way: Organizations targeting young users – users increasingly wedded to their mobile devices – will take the “.mobi” route, he said.

“We’re approaching schools, colleges and universities, night clubs,” Allocca said. “Basically, it’s the 18 to 35 market who almost uses their cell phone just to kill time.”

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