



Smartphones Ring up the Sales – Tablets Mobilizing the Next Surge

By Greg Quirk

Consumer demand for smartphones has surpassed the purchases of PCs for the first time. According to a report from IDC, the last quarter of 2010 recorded over 100 million smartphones sold worldwide compared to 92 million computers. And this does not take into account the iPhone being available in February from Verizon, with estimates that over 1 million were sold in the first week, so the unit sales for smartphones in the first quarter of 2011 are expected to be even higher. The demand for smartphones is not surprising as the capabilities have increased over the past years to provide the basic functionality that people want in a computer.

Advantages of Smartphones

With a smartphone you can check your e-mail, surf the web, listen to music, watch videos, Tweet, update your Facebook status and do most basic “computer” functions, not to mention actually making calls. The advantages go beyond the functionality however. There are minimal boot times for smartphones as they are always left on so you do not need to wait for the system to start up. The small size and wireless connectivity means that you are not stuck at a desk or in a home. While the screen may be small, it is clear enough to be able to easily read emails or books, or watch a video, especially since you are able to move it close to your eyes. And extended battery life means that you can enjoy the features for longer than you would be able to on a laptop.

Mobile Viewing Habits

According to NBC, over 60% of mobile visitors to the NBC website are from smartphones within a home network as opposed to over a cellular connection. This indicates that people are interested in watching streamed TV shows on a microscreen even when a large screen TV is readily available. Other networks and over the top operators, such as Netflix and Hulu, are ensuring that consumers can view their content any where, at any time, on any device which helps to drive interest in smartphones. Over the past year there has been a 53% increase in mobile viewing habits with the expectation that this will continue to grow.

Working on the Go

This trend is also driving the creation of new mobile specific content on long-established websites. The challenge going forward: delivering a content-rich mobile site with a simplified interface and fewer graphics to minimize the delay resulting from slower 3G cellular data transmission. For example, MouserMobile is a completely new realization of the award-winning Mouser.com website – consistently voted tops in technical information, search and ease of use. Anyone can now search for new products by parts number, supplier or keyword from more than 25 mobile platforms, more smartphones and tablets than any other distributor’s mobile site. Furthermore, by utilizing the existing MyMouser account platform, customer information is automatically applied to the shopping cart, making purchasing quick

and simple. It even supports 16 different languages and currencies when shopping. All in all, MouserMobile represents the most advanced, multilingual, multicurrency mobile site for design engineers and buyers on the move.

Tablets Entering the Scene

While smartphones have surpassed computers as the dominant technology, the rival emerging on the scene are tablets. While the Apple iPad has been out for almost a year now, alternative solutions from Motorola, HP and RIM are only months, or in some cases weeks, away from entering the market. Apple fans have purchased over 14.8 million iPads, and some investors expect as many as 35 million units of iPad and second generation iPads will be sold in 2011. But other customers have been waiting for more open platforms which the Android operating system, being used in Motorola and HP tablets, will offer.

To some people tablets offer the best of both worlds. The screen size is larger than a smartphone allowing for more information to be displayed or being able to view more comfortably, but not so large that the portability is completely lost. Virtual keyboard input is also more convenient as the size more replicates a computer keyboard so that you can type with both hands instead of just your thumbs. Compared to laptops, the battery life of a tablet keeps content flowing for longer. The only downside compared to a smartphone is that you can not actually make calls, and it does not fit easily in a pocket.

Smartphones vs. Tablets in the Future

It will be interesting to see how tablets and smartphone sales compare in the coming year. Cell phones are, to most people, no longer considered a nice to have, it is a necessary purchase. Tablets, however, do not have the same level of need from consumers. They are a status symbol to some, as smartphones were five years ago, and it will take years before they are powerful enough before they are able to even come close to taking the place of a computer. So while tablet sales will skyrocket compared to the zero percent they had a year ago, I do not believe that the total sales will come anywhere near that of smartphones or computers. But considering that this created a new market place where there was none, any sale is impressive.

Greg Quirk has been a technical writer since 2004 focusing on semiconductor components, consumer devices and business trends. He has written numerous articles for industry publications and presented at technical conferences. His expertise has been sought by the financial community on multiple occasions to predict design-wins in popular consumer products.



The advertisement banner features a dark blue background with a subtle grid pattern. On the left, the Mouser Electronics logo is displayed in white, with 'MOUSER ELECTRONICS' in a bold, sans-serif font and 'a tti company' in a smaller font below it. Below the logo is the 'mousermobile' logo, which includes a small wireless signal icon. In the center, three smartphones are shown, each displaying the MouserMobile website interface. To the right of the phones, the text reads: 'The **most** advanced, multilingual, multicurrency mobile site for design engineers.' In the bottom right corner, there is an orange rectangular box containing the Mouser logo (a white 'M' on a blue square) followed by 'mouser.com' and the text 'Distributing semiconductors and electronic components for design engineers.'