

Zeitschrift: Comtec : Informations- und Telekommunikationstechnologie = information and telecommunication technology

Herausgeber: Swisscom

Band: 81 (2003)

Heft: 6

Artikel: Ten tips on maximising site traffic

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-876659>

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Driving Hotspot Revenues

Ten Tips on Maximising Site Traffic

The Wireless LAN market offers a new revenue stream in a down-trodden market, an opportunity for growth in a turbulent economy. Yet the difficulty for carriers in this space is that for the first time, service delivery has them removed from the customer by the site owner in terms of service delivery. Therefore, if the customer's experience is dictated by his interaction with the site rather than directly with the network, how can the carrier drive traffic while aloof from the interaction?

With ten top tips this article explores ways in which the wireline or wireless carrier can drive traffic at the hotspot, and how this symbiotic relationship can best be managed.

ANTHONY BEHAN

Tip 1: Incent, Reward and Punish

All hotspot site owners need to have sight of the business proposition. As the service evolves and is popularised, revenues will increase, and must be given visibility of the market forecasts, projections and potential rewards. In addition, carriers should not make the mistake of allowing hotspot site owners the luxury of having the service as an "add-on" to their core product, something that is an added extra. If site owners are thinking in this way then they will not be driven to increasing traffic on the hotspot, but merely having the service available. All site owners should be on a share of revenues, including roaming revenues, delivering increased return for increased traffic. Site owners should be goal driven, incentivised with greater percent-

ages or bonuses on achieving traffic thresholds across a time period. A league table should be established, appropriately segmented by site floor area, to identify top performers, and also weaker sites. The weaker sites should be encouraged to do better, and problems with performance should be identified so as to better address them. In some circumstances, support for the site could be withdrawn, as all sites remain a drain on the carrier resources, and the least performant may be inappropriate in the context of the overall business.

Tip 2: Embed the Service in a Process

Clearly defined processes for error management, reporting and access to support should be established early on in the delivery of the service. Given the technical issues associated with operating a hotspot, a help desk should be established early on, and a main point of contact in each site location. Where frequently occurring problems arise, there should be a standard reaction process – the site worker should have a FAQ sheet to utilise and an escalation procedure. Compensation rules should be set where appropriate, thus ensuring the customer experience remains solid. There should

be clearly defined reporting procedures, reporting errors and error occurrences back to the host carrier. There should be regular feedback sessions, and hotspot site owner fora for discussion. All of these processes should eliminate uncertainty in the consumer experience, and deliver a consistent, more controlled service.

Tip 3: Train the Staff

Working in MacDonald's is not quite the hi-tech world of the future, but with the introduction of Wireless LAN into its restaurants in the USA, Japan and other countries announced in early 2003, it presents an interesting combination of businesses. However, it also presents a difficulty for the restaurant owner in delivering support for the Wireless LAN user base. Staff training sessions in these locations should, where possible, focus on service, customer care and process, rather than expecting non-technical staff to sort out DHCP connections and Access Point configuration issues.

Tip 4: Service Level Agreements

Service level agreements are a sometimes controversial part of partner relationships in the telco and cellco business. How-



Some hotspots are in high-profile catchments, such as airports and campuses.

ever, there is a quid pro quo on this, where the management of the relationship between the operator and the customer is being partially delegated to the site owner. Just as the operator can promise the delivery of a certain standard in technical terms, the hotspot site owner can deliver in terms of customer care. The delivery on this is an essential protective layer for the operator seeking to drive revenues from Wireless LAN, yet protect their customer from the uncertainties of a third party intervention between operator and customer in the value chain.

Tip 5: Be Flexible

Different sites have different attributes. Some are big, some are small. Some are high street, flagship locations, some are backstreet, "niche" locations. Some hotspots are in high-profile catchments, such as airports and campuses. The differences in each hotspot should be understood in the context of their relative performance. Therefore settlements should be negotiable; growth should be acknowledged, such that, for example, one location that opens an extension should be permitted a change in status and the appropriate settlement plan. Hotspots that open new branches should be entitled to benefit from multiple locations contributing to volume bonuses, with obvious caveats. Just as performance should be rewarded, change should be acknowledged in the status of a hotspot partner.

Tip 6: Segment and Categorise the Location

As mentioned above, each hotspot has its own characteristics. The management of these sites should therefore be segmented and organised as if they were customers. Just as a customer has attributes such as age, sex, home city and so forth that inform us as to their profile and requirements, so too do hotspot locations have attributes that let us know how they should be treated. Square footage, the year in which the business was established, the core business, location, and other characteristics help define segmentation for each hotspot. Multi-branch partners may have hotspots in different segments, where segment is driven by location. For example, WiFi cafés in the business district of a major city will be more appropriate for bandwidth hungry road warriors, and should

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therefore be in the "Business District Café segment". A business decision should be taken on whether or not that segment should be further divided according to the size of the location. Dynamic segmentation, achieved through a rules based approach to business model management (i. e. in the billing, rating and revenue sharing software systems that support the business model) are critical on this point.

Tip 7: Personalise and Localise the Experience

Each experience is different. MacDonald's seats are designed to become uncomfortable after a set period of time, while Starbucks are happy to accommodate business travellers for long periods. The business traveller is less likely to have screaming kids in a Starbucks, which can help. Outdoor hotspot locations present other experiential concerns – one cannot look at a laptop screen comfortably in the sun for more than about ten minutes. In addition, there are different things desired in different places. In MacDonald's, there is a good chance that a family or children might accompany the user, and they can play at Disney.com while I make a phone call. At Starbucks, perhaps the splash screen introduction will show the offer on Columbian Rich Roast today. At the library, college offers will be made available, and student loan advertisements.

Tip 8: Apples, Oranges and Burgers: Integrate with Caution

MacDonald's are famously offering one hour of free access with an Extra Value Meal. A WiFi Burger with Cheese? The

combination of these two products is an innovative proposition, and it will be interesting to see how the businesses develop. The combination of coffee and WiFi access in Starbucks' restaurants, and pizza with access in Pizza Hut represent similar propositions that may have a perceived value to the site owner, but less value to the carrier supplying the traffic. This can be an important part of the site owner's strategy, and needs to be taken on board as part of a packaged offering to the site owner.

Tip 9: Deliver Value to the Partner

Reporting and business support information are vital elements of the partner business. The partner needs to have visibility of the usage patterns and requirements in his own location. The operator, as the central metadata repository in the Wireless LAN value chain, holds the key to this information, and the timely (real-time) and detailed (drill-down) delivery of these reports offers the operator a chance to keep the partner happy, and similarly leaves the partner devoid of the "I didn't know" excuse when thresholds are not met and performance slips.

Tip 10: Understand the Partner Business

The café, hotel and airport are very different businesses. They are certainly not communications businesses. It is important to the site owner that the carrier supplying the network understands their unique concerns, and can offer packages that are tailored to suit the needs of their customer base. Just as restaurants are looking for new revenue streams, they are also looking for ways in which to sell more food. An acknowledgement and awareness of these issues will always be respected, and will help to establish a mutually beneficial relationship. 3

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