

Heavy snow hampers online sales

► Bad weather and subsequent delivery problems slowed e-commerce growth in the UK at the end of 2010, say KPMG and the British Retail Consortium in a new report.

The snow caused major logistical headaches for providers, which offset an increase in snowbound shoppers buying from home.

E-commerce sales usually skyrocket during the holiday season, but December sales jumped by only 18 percent compared with November. There was a 26 percent rise in the corresponding period in 2009.

Some online retailers were even forced to restrict ordering during their busiest time of the year, says Stephen Robertson, Director General of the British Retail Consortium. ●

8 percent

► ... OF ALL BUSINESS INTERNET TRAFFIC goes to Facebook, and 11.4 percent to YouTube, according to a report from managed security services company Network Box.

Skype adds video calls to iPhone

► SKYPE HAS RELEASED version 3.0 of its iPhone app, which adds video-calling to its internet-telephony service. Two-way video calls using Skype for the iPhone can be made with both Wi-Fi and 3G connections, using an iOS 4.x-equipped iPhone 4, iPhone 3GS and fourth-generation iPod touch.



Internet users more likely to do volunteer work

► INTERNET users are significantly more likely to be a member of a volunteer group or organization, says the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. In the US, only 56 percent of non-internet users participate in a volunteer group, compared with 80 percent of internet users. Social-media users are even more active at 82 percent, with Twitter users topping the list at 85 percent. ●

Tweeting takes to the streets

► TWEETS FROM MOBILE PHONES now make up more than 40 percent of all Twitter posts, says company CEO Dick Costolo in an interview with MarketingWeek.

Twitter now has more than 175 million registered users worldwide, with more than 100 million of those users signing up in the past 12 months. There were 25 billion tweets over the same time period.

Costolo said the mobile growth was due to the launch of official Twitter clients for the iPhone, Android and BlackBerry platforms. ●

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Boring – and proud of it

► WE ARE BACK WHERE WE STARTED. Seeing, hearing and speaking to someone simultaneously is clearly the most basic form of human communication – and probably also the most efficient. Technology has recreated that Stone Age means of personal interaction – while overcoming one challenge posed by physical distance. It is truly awesome, since this is in fact a dream as old as the telephone itself. This dream has inspired a lot of wonderful – and sometimes weird and crazy – innovation, but most of these ideas have not been fit to commercialize and make available to a larger audience. The market has been, and continues to be, quite fragmented.

This issue's theme argues that, at long last, we are seeing visual communication develop into an affordable, reliable, everyday service. Some good old telecom virtues – standardization and control – are playing a key role in this process, as technology and innovation need to be organized. This sounds boring, but otherwise new technologies would not scale to reach the mass market. Telecom is good at organizing technology on a grand scale – and this is a huge task. Still, there is no guarantee that network operators will play a leading role in the emerging market for visual communication. Frankly, this is a source of concern, and our aim with the theme has been to provide operators with some strategic advice.

WE ALSO HIGHLIGHT the continuing successful rollout of 4G, whatever that means nowadays. 4G is crucial to China's ambition to take a leading position in the telecom technology race. This is an interesting development that we cover in the article about TD-LTE.

Maybe the ITU was right to yield to the marketers – who needed a catchy sales pitch – and compromise on its earlier, strict definition of 4G. However, some wonder whether the term 4G has lost its meaning as a result. Certainly, standards purists are not too pleased about the ITU's decision, which could have an adverse effect on the image of telecom as the firm anchor in an otherwise very chaotic world of competing communications technologies. 4G obviously has a short-term value as a marketing label, but it could ultimately confuse consumers.

LIFE AFTER VOICE is more than just a USB-dongle. As we enter the second phase of mobile broadband, one would hope for more sophisticated marketing regarding the value proposition for consumers. It is clearly more than just a case of adding another "G". The article In Search of the Sweet Spot aims to identify value-based business models for mobile broadband. Operators are by no means destined to deliver only the raw material for other industries to refine and monetize. Defining the value and packaging it in a smart way drives not only traffic (which is needed; the overload scenario is very much exaggerated), but also profitability. The figures are already bearing this out.

The music industry loves Spotify, and so does telecom – for good reason. Listening to Spotify's Faisal Galaria, this issue's cover personality, is another lesson in value creation. The music is the same, but it is being packaged and delivered in a new context that makes the money flow in new directions. That sounds a lot like finding the sweet spot. ●

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