

Survey reveals extent of shift in mobile UI preferences

– More than half want a touchscreen in their next phone

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For immediate release

Canalys consumer research highlights

In a recent survey conducted by Canalys with more than 3,000 mobile phone users across France, Germany and the UK, 38% said a finger-based touchscreen would be the preferred main user interface on their next mobile phone, with a further 16% opting for a stylus-based touchscreen, suggesting a continuing market shift toward touch-centric devices. This bodes well for smart phone vendors whose designs are focused on delivering a great experience in this area and should prompt those lagging behind to reconsider their strategies.

But the results also raise questions about how well users are coping with the finger-based touchscreen UIs currently on the market and how good a design job vendors have done so far. Of those for whom this was already their primary method of interacting with the phone, only 47% said they would choose the same type of UI on their next model. While higher than the mean across all users it does suggest disappointment with current UIs. Looking at the results by handset brand, HTC and Apple stood out as having a much higher proportion of users wanting to stick with the same type of UI, while Sony Ericsson had the lowest proportion among the major handset vendors, at just 29%.

“The results suggest that consumer awareness of touchscreen UIs is very high, driven by the marketing of Apple, Samsung and others, and there is no doubt that the changes in device design we have seen over the past couple of years have produced some very exciting products,” said Pete Cunningham, senior analyst at Canalys, “But it is also apparent that, with experience, a significant proportion of users have not been totally won over by some of these devices. This is to be expected, as it is quite a big shift for many users to make, but a poor experience with one touchscreen device may dissuade users from trying another one in the future and it is imperative that vendors focus on usability and practicality as well as visual appeal, and continue to enhance their interfaces. There has always been a question mark over how well touchscreens would work among an SMS-centric audience and the results indicate the transition has not been totally smooth.”

The group with the least desire for finger-centric touchscreen products was, interestingly, those that currently use a stylus-based device. “This is another example of how strongly current user experience sets future expectations,” Cunningham added. “It is likely that many of those users perceive moving from stylus to finger as a loss of precision that would degrade usability, hence the underlying resistance. However, within

this group there was notably less push back by current HTC and Samsung owners – two vendors that put their own finger-driven UI on top of Windows Mobile – which suggests they may be more successful in migrating customers in this segment.”

Overall, future interest in finger-centric touchscreens varied little across demographic groups, tariff types and countries, reinforcing the view that they have mass-market appeal. Men showed a slightly higher preference than women – 40% versus 35%. Those aged between 22 and 45 were more positive than those in younger and older age groups, but again the differences were not dramatic.

“We are at a critical time in the mobile industry,” commented Canalys VP Mike Welch. “The user awareness and interest is clearly there, and the opportunity to drive a mass change in user interaction, and hence device capabilities and the opening up of new application and service revenue streams, is tantalisingly close. But only if users continue to embrace these new UIs once they have tried them. This is the new arena in which mobile vendors must differentiate themselves, and the user experience battle will spread to other product categories, such as netbooks.”

Changing mobile user behaviour will be one of the many important topics discussed at the Canalys Mobility Forum in London on November 17. Full details are available at www.canalysmobilityforum.com.

About Canalys

Canalys specialises in delivering high quality market data, analysis and advice to the world’s leading technology vendors. It is recognised as a key provider of continuous advisory services and confidential custom projects for marketing managers and strategists within blue-chip IT, telecoms, navigation and consumer electronics companies. It has unrivalled expertise in routes to market for all kinds of high technology products and services and provides worldwide market data and trends analysis.

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