

It's all about the connection

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Forget drones and connected homes, the most important trend for mobile is the arrival of ultra-cheap smartphones and better connections. Ben Phillips explains.

CES is a bit of a freak show. What crazy devices are they going to launch and do they really expect that to take off? Literally, it seems, in the case of this year's big PR triumph, the man-carrying drone.

What got less attention in Las Vegas but will probably dominate Mobile World Congress next month is the arrival of something more important: a cheaper smartphone.

Huawei, who alongside Xiaomi is revamping the manufacturing market, announced the Honor 5x, which, at a cost of just \$199 for the handset, offers a slim metal chassis, 5.5" 1080p display, dual SIM slots, and a 3000 mAh

battery.

This mid-level smartphone has a wealth of features designed to appeal to the emerging consumers of Asia, who will welcome a new opportunity to upgrade from feature phones (which in turn will drop down to the next level of the population).

Future entry-level smart phone launches could be as cheap as \$40, pushing feature phones even further down the funnel.

The Honor 5x will just be one of a range of similar devices available to consumers post Mobile World Congress. The trend towards better, faster processing power at a lower and lower cost will enable the mobile revolution to reach more and more consumers.

Compelling Offer

The power of the smartphone – combined with the ubiquitous selfie stick (first launched at CES in 2014) – with pro-grade camera lenses to put high quality photography and video into everyday use is a compelling offer.

It gives us the power to document and share events in our lives from the food that we eat, the news story that resonates our own opinions or the video blog of our last holiday (but only the good bits when the kids behaved like angels and the sun was at its brightest).

All this is very well, but great smartphones – whatever they cost – are only effective if they also can connect to great networks.

“Many of our predictions for mobile will fail to come true, if the networks cannot provide those services”

Smartphone users – new and old – now consume vast amounts of content and share/store albums worth of images and video.

I remember being foolish enough to try and download mp3 files over dial-up. The first 2G handsets struggled to receive network connectivity outside of a metropolitan area.

The sad fact is that, as a country-living individual at a substantial distance from my telephone exchange, I still struggle to obtain optimum connectivity via home WiFi or the network. Should a cow move in the field opposite my house, it can apparently block the 4G connectivity I need to power my connected lifestyle.

Many of our predictions for mobile will fail to come true, if the networks cannot provide those services.

Better Networks

So while we believe that gigabit bandwidth will become the norm for many and the number of people using Wi-Fi to make calls and send video will continue to increase in the next 12 months, better networks are essential for all.

Mobile carriers have already significantly increased their Wi-Fi footprint, and the most advanced Wi-Fi enabled phones now offer seamless in-call switching between 4G and Wi-Fi networks.

Faster connections and the prevalence of WiFi access points bolted under manhole covers and on top of telephone boxes will make voice and video over WiFi seamless, at least in urban areas.

Within this environment the opportunities for brands are huge. Our role as agencies is to help our clients manage and enhance this experience.

“I don’t know a single person outside of the industry who has downloaded an ad blocker”

For all the talk of ad blockers, Deloitte predicts that just 0.3% of all mobile device owner’s smartphones and tablets will have an ad blocker by the end of this year.

This is a prediction that I would support. I don’t know a single person outside of the industry who has downloaded an ad blocker. The few inside our business who have downloaded one have done so for testing purposes.

Nevertheless, there is still an opportunity to reduce that 0.3% even further by delivering better content that entices engagement.

With better, faster connectivity, affordable handset packed full of features, we as an industry have never had a better tool kit.

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