

Mobile World Congress 2016: what to expect

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BY BEN PHILLIPS 19 FEB 2016 4 min read

Beyond the excess of tapas and the tired feet, Mobile World Congress is an opportunity to reassess how mobile works for brands and how it can be more creative, says MediaCom's Global Head of Mobile, Ben Phillips.

I've been attending Mobile World Congress for nearly a decade and I can guarantee that some things will happen:

Someone will launch a new handset featuring a camera with a humungous number of megapixels.

Someone will launch a new range of white goods that you can control via your mobile.

Someone will announce a new form of next generation mobile networks that can carry more data to more places faster than ever.

But in 2016 we will also see more interesting announcements. MWC is no longer a gathering of mobile geeks, getting together once a year to reassure ourselves that the "Year of Mobile" will actually happen in our lifetime.

Now that Facebook is making billions of dollars from mobile, everyone knows how important this channel has become. That's why Sir Martin Sorrell and Mark Zuckerberg will be among the speakers in Barcelona next week.

This is the third year in a row that Zuckerberg has turned up for MWC and that commitment reflects the power of the mobile-first generation that is just reaching adulthood.

The marketing business now comes to Barcelona too and MWC has become the third pillar in the global schedule for many clients; Cannes, CES and MWC are all must-attend, must understand.

The goal for attendees this year's show should be to get answers to, or at least a pathway to a solution, in the following three areas:

1. There's a huge opportunity for the Facebook of the Internet of Things

Now that we can control so many devices via our mobiles, a single one stop shop will help drive consumer uptake. Expect announcements from hardware suppliers for a new generation of wearables that might create more momentum too.

2. A demand for a simpler mobile ad:tech ecosystem

The last two years of MWC have been awash with new solutions, it's time to filter out the Lumascape and find a better route to native and solutions that scale. With Millennial and Opera Mediaworks already acquired by AOL and a consortium of Chinese investors respectively, it wouldn't be a surprise to see ad networks combining with creative studios and/or publishers.

3. A better plan for mobile content and how can brands do this with limited assets and resource

The search for partners to help deliver on the promise of ad block proof messages will be key in Barcelona. With their livelihoods at risk, expect publishers to say something about better advertorial pieces that go beyond IAB standard formats and click bait pages.

What often gets forgotten at shows like Mobile World Congress is the consumer.

After all, they are the billions who are going to use these new handsets, apps and control their devices.

Consumers in emerging markets will welcome the rise of the more affordable smartphone – expect announcements of sub \$100 phones in Barcelona – but consumers everywhere would like better battery life, something most handset manufacturers show no sign of offering.

Consumers also want the carriers to deliver faster more reliable data connections and speeds will be paramount when we are constantly sharing and gobbling up data like a hungry mobile hippo.

For advertising and marketing executives with their high end smartphones it's also too easy to forget the mere mortals who make do with mid and low-range devices as well as the millions of feature phones that will be passed down to new generation of mobile first, connected consumers around the world.

Mobiles never die, they simply find a new demographic. The challenge for many international brands is to learn the lessons of the past and find new ways to address the huge population of feature phone users.

If you keep one mantra in mind at Mobile World Congress, it should be how can I use all the shiny innovations, technology and infrastructure to change consumer behaviour and how can it be used to help make mobile a better experience.

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