

Mobile World Congress day three: the network capacity crunch

[PEOPLE](#) [MOBILE](#) [OPINION](#)

BY BEN PHILLIPS 25 FEB 2016 4 min read

The battle to upgrade mobile infrastructure with 5G will take time. MediaCom's Ben Phillips, Global Head of Mobile, explains how consumers and their handsets will cope.

This time last year, brands and agencies were obsessed with the latest mobile ad tech and programmatic. In 2016, it's been much less of a focus at Mobile World Congress.

It's still big business, of course – two of the biggest ad tech deals to date have happened in the last couple of weeks with Tapad's sale to Telenor and Opera's acquisition by a Chinese consortium.

However, this critical part of the mobile advertising landscape has been overshadowed for two key reasons.

Firstly, brands and agencies spent much of last year working out how to better deliver messages via the new ad tech infrastructure.

Secondly, as a result of that effort, marketers and their agencies are much more focused on the devices that consumers will experience those messages on and how they can be used to create deeper, more meaningful experiences.

That focus has been helped by the fact that we've seen a much more exciting range of products at 2016's show, ranging from virtual reality to 360-degree cameras and digital personal assistants, not to mention a wide range of exciting new handsets to look at. Last year, all we got were a few wearables.

The unifying feature of all these new devices is their ability to capture social moments in startling, sharper clarity than ever before, meaning we're all going to create and share more data because of the higher resolution.

Now, combine that with the increasing volume of video being consumed.

BuzzFeed, for example, revealed that it has grown its video consumption from 100 million views a month in 2012 to six billion a month in 2016. It's even launched a bespoke video app to allow viewers to box-set binge on their content.

Such developments set clear challenges for our handsets and the mobile networks in terms of the data we can store and the bandwidth we consume. 5G has been very much on the radar at the show, such as BT being bullish

about its plans for 5G and the EE network.

5G will offer 50 to 100 times faster data but there are no common standards as yet, hence the uncertainty about just how much faster it will be. The construction of the new networks will not start for some years to come.

What we've seen instead is the interim solution to this conundrum in the form of MIMO – that's More In More Out – chips from Qualcomm, that allow handsets to download four independent streams of 4G, generating 16 times the bandwidth over the current 4G network.

Prototype handsets are in the works from the likes of Sony to help us manage until 5G is ready. The alternative will be to rely even more than we already do on the cafés and public spaces with decent Wi-Fi.

One of the other surprises of this year's show is how brands that used to be – well, not very good – are suddenly coming up with decent equipment.

LG once launched an extra-long handset called the Chocolate; this year's LG G5 is right up there and smartly includes the free memory slots we will need to help store all the data-rich content that we will be creating.

Those of us that can remember back to less than a decade ago will recall the need to carry spare memory cards. It may be that we will be revisiting that experience in years to come, unless the bandwidth for cloud based storage becomes more accessible.

Another manufacturer that appears to have turned a corner is Alcatel, perhaps best known for phones that Granny liked because of their big buttons. Now, the packaging for the new mid-range Idol converts niftily into a basic Virtual Reality headset. The relevant software is preinstalled on the phone.

All this raises the question of how premium brands define their offer. Handsets from the likes of Alcatel and LG are certainly good enough for 99 per cent of consumers.

When a mid-level smartphone comes complete with VR headset (admittedly not of the same standard as an Oculus), we can see how small the window for premium products is becoming.

The lesson from this year's show is that the gap between the handset manufacturers from top to bottom has become pretty infinitesimal in most cases.

Make a good phone and you'll sell millions; slip back 1 per cent and you'll end up discounting heavily.

First published by Campaign