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Best Buy: Apps driving smartphone adoption in U.S.

By Dan Butcher

June 26, 2009



A Best Buy Mobile store in New York

Best Buy Mobile commissioned a survey revealing that one-fourth of adults 18-34 who do not already have a smartphone are planning to buy one in the next 12 months.

The survey found that three in ten 18-24-year-olds who do not have a smartphone want one. The poll of 1,000 Americans, half men and half women all over the age of 18, was conducted by

telephone last month by GfK Roper, a division of GfK Custom Research North America, to get a snapshot of current habits, preferences and purchase intentions among today's mobile phone users.

"The survey demonstrated tremendous interest in the smartphone category and that many of the killer apps on these devices are prompting many consumers to upgrade to smartphones this year," said Scott Moore, vice president of marketing for Best Buy Mobile, Minneapolis, MN.

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"It's also very apparent that the mobile phone shopping experience hasn't been good for consumers in the past," he said. "We believe shopping for mobile devices should be fun.

"We trust that customers who are looking to get the most out of their mobile life will check out our Best Buy Mobile stores and visit with our associates to see what mobile devices and programs may be right for their lifestyle needs."



Best Buy Mobile calls in the Geek Squad

Best Buy Mobile retail locations feature more than 90 different handsets from nine carriers and a range of accessories.

Growing hunger for smartphones

The category of smartphones—mobile devices with Web-browsing and other computer functionality—has become a cornerstone for Best Buy Mobile, now in 1,067 U.S.

locations both within traditional Best Buy stores as well as in standalone units.

The GfK survey demonstrates many of the drivers and barriers to Americans' smartphone purchases.



Best Buy your best bet

Only one in five of adults surveyed already owns a smartphone, but a sizable segment of those in their 20s and 30s in particular consider it a purchase they plan to make in the year ahead.

Three in 10 people 18-24 who do not have a smartphone want one. More than a quarter of people 18-34 said they plan to purchase a smartphone within the next year.

Of adults who do not yet own a smartphone, nearly half—47 percent—claimed they are too confused by the vast assortment of models and features.

Barriers to smartphone ownership include the expense, difficulty with the shopping experience and confusion about models.

Fifty-two percent of women and 42 percent of men are confused about which model of smartphone to buy, and more than half—53 percent—of adults over 50 express this confusion.

Sixty-four percent of Americans say they do not own a smartphone because they believe the devices are too expensive. This sentiment is particularly felt in the South.

Thirty-nine percent do not own a smartphone because they hate shopping for electronics products, with 45 percent of women in particular expressing this concern.

Apps, real-time connectivity put smartphones on a pedestal

Traditional mobile phones have been characterized largely by the twin features of calling and texting.

Interest in smartphones has centered around a wider universe of applications that allow consumers to read digital books, film videos, get directions from any current location, make travel reservations and download real-time content from the Internet.

For those surveyed who own smartphones, the most important features are accessing information from the Internet, sending messages and taking digital photos.

More than half—58 percent—feel it is important to be able to listen to music on their mobile phone.

Forty-one percent feel it is important to be able to engage in social networking such as Facebook, MySpace or Twitter. And 36 percent said being able to play games is important.

When it comes to which features are most in-demand, there is a gender divide.

Seventy-one percent of women said that sending text messages is "very important," compared to 46 percent of men.

Taking digital photos with a phone was also "very important" to 55 percent of women compared to 30 percent of men.

Forty-four percent of women also shared that listening to music on their mobile device is "very important," compared to only 25 percent of men.

Men surveyed were more likely than women—46 versus 39 percent—to say that it is very important that their phones have calendar applications that link back to their computers.

But in nearly all instances, women considered features and applications as "very important" more than men did, including video games.

Forty-four percent of women ranked playing games as very important compared to 9 percent of men.

Men were also clearly less interested than women in reading books on their phone—all of the 8 percent of respondents that were very interested in this application were women.

Women were also more likely than men to use their mobile phone's GPS system. Fifty-one percent of women, compared to 33 percent of men, considered getting directions on their phone "very important."

With all the applications that entice those in the younger age ranges, there is still a perception among some that smartphones are more for business than pleasure.

Almost half—49 percent—of Americans without smartphones now believe that people who use smartphones are too connected to their jobs at all times, particularly the older generations who tend to view smartphones as more functional than fun.

Only 30 percent of adults 18-24 feel this way versus 60 percent of adults 35-49.

The secret lives of a texting nation

Whether using traditional number keys, slide-out or built-in keyboards or even touchscreen typing, an overwhelming majority of Americans prefer text messaging as a quick and convenient way to communicate.

And this affinity for the written word in the hands of mobile phone users provided some provocative statistics, according to Best Buy.

Of all Americans with mobile phones, 62 percent say they use text messaging, mostly because it's a convenient and quick way to communicate.

More than one-third—37 percent—say they use texting to avoid long or tough conversations, and more than one-quarter—27 percent—say they use it because they dislike talking on the phone.

One-quarter feel it's a great way to flirt, particularly among the 18-24-year-old set, 39 percent of them in fact.

One in four of American mobile phone users surveyed admitted they have spied and read someone else's text messages without permission. This includes looking at the messages of spouses, partners, friends or even their own kids.

Nearly 38 percent said they had sent a text message to the wrong person by mistake.

Texting leaves a lot of room for interpretation by the recipient, and 37 percent say they've been misunderstood by a person receiving their text message.

One-fourth of Americans—23 percent—admitted to "TWI," or texting while intoxicated, and 30 percent of men and 18 percent of women said they regretted something they had written in a text message.

Going to extremes to maintain a mobile lifestyle

If caught in the rain with a choice of a mobile phone or an umbrella, nearly 37 percent of Americans would choose their mobile phone.

Six in ten—60 percent—of those surveyed shared they would rather abstain from alcohol for a week than give up their mobile phone.

One in three would give up television to keep their mobile phone.

A passionate minority—15 percent of Americans—said they would rather have their teeth drilled at the dentist's office than give up their mobile phone for a week.

"Our marketing strategy is pretty simple: The networks and handset manufacturers do a great job building awareness for amazing products like the iPhone 3G S, Palm Pre and the Blackberry Bold," Mr. Moore said. "Our job is to invite customers to start having a better experience choosing and using their next phone.

"We do that through a blend of mass, online and one-to-one media," he said. "As a brand, we focus on delighting Best Buy's best customers first, so we prioritize investment in channels that reach them efficiently and effectively.

"Most campaigns are done in collaboration with our partners."

Best Buy Mobile does not disclose specific sales figures or reveal its top-selling smartphones.

That said, the company said that more than 40 percent of consumers plan to upgrade to a smartphone in the next 12 months.

"That's a powerful statement given the current economic climate," Mr. Moore said.

"We believe Best Buy Mobile is the best place to upgrade to a smartphone because we have a tremendous assortment of phones and plans all in one place, highly trained and dedicated mobile phone specialists, straightforward pricing and programs like 'Walk Out Working,' in which we transfer our customers' contacts and set up their email for free," he said.

"We continue to outpace the market in smartphones and won't be content until everyone who wants one has one."

Staff Reporter Dan Butcher covers banking and payments, carrier networks, commerce, database/CRM, manufacturers, music, software and technology. Reach him at dan@mobilemarketer.com.

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