

Why brands should focus more on the tablet browser

February 3, 2011



By **Tom Limongello**

At the end of last year, Nick Bilton of The New York Times' Bits Blog questioned his earlier prediction that 2010 would be the Year of the Tablet and, instead, surmised that it turned out to be the Year of the iPad.

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It made me think of my favorite scene from "Men in Black 2," where a miniature colony that lives in a bus locker prays to "The Tablet," which was really a business card that Tommy Lee Jones had left for them the last time he visited.

The market for tablets is big in our minds but small in overall effect on the bottom line for most publishers and advertisers.

But make no mistake, in 2010 the iPad made an indelible mark on how we approach content consumption, media development and advertising.

In 2011, the story will be about both innovation and growth, and the most activity will happen in tablet browsers.

So I propose that while 2010 may have been the Year of the iPad, 2011 will be the Year of the Tablet Browser.

There are a few factors at play here:

1. Breadth of tablets

The Consumer Electronics Show last month was awash with a flood of tablet announcements, including more than 40 new devices based on Android, Windows Phone 7 and other operating systems.

Now rumors are already heating up over the iPad 2.

IDC predicts that more than 44 million tablets will ship in 2011, 40 percent of which will be in the United States, growing to 70 million-plus in 2012.

The array of tablets to support drives content producers toward a Web-based model versus apps.

2. Growth of tablet usage

Consumers are already spending more time on mobile devices than reading newspapers and magazines combined.

While some blogs report more browser traffic to their sites from the iPad than either Linux or Android, Chitika predicts that iPad traffic will generate more than 2 percent of North America's net traffic by 2011. And this browser traffic looks a lot more like desktop browsing than mobile.

3. Problems with the app ecosystem

Publishers focused on print content have gone down the applications road, but still face some tough decisions on pricing, subscriptions and bundles.

Right now, the Apple AppStore does not allow publishers to bundle free iPad issues for print subscribers and still has not perfected the subscription model for applications.

Whether or not tablet owners will pay for content remains to be seen, as recent studies show that iPad users actually prefer ad-supported content.

Whichever way they go, applications developers still drive iPad browser traffic to their Web domain.

For example, if the content housed in free iPad applications is incomplete, they would look for the rest of the content in iPad Safari.

Also, those who own iPads are also quite likely to be users of Facebook or Twitter for finding news links shared from friends. Applications generally do not deep-link users to their applications, but instead drive browser traffic through iPad Safari.

4. Advancement of tablet browsers and Web apps

Safari is already the biggest application on the iPad in terms of traffic.

With the advancement of browser functionality and HTML5-compatible Web applications, the browser is becoming a much more compelling place to be.

Firefox 4 includes touch and multi-touch events, and these features will be supported on Windows Phone 7 tablets.

OK, maybe you think that is not that interesting. Did you know that the Google Chrome store links work in Chrome, Firefox and Safari?

Because Apple has been such a proponent of HTML5, Chrome links will work on Safari for Mac, Safari for iPad and, although the style sheets aren't scaled for it, you can even see it on Safari for iPhone.

In 2010 while you were busy either downloading applications or browsing on your iPad, big publishers were busy readying their .com video content for Safari by giving an H.264 version of their Web videos for iPad, instead of the Flash videos that they served to the desktop.

In 2011 those same publishers who see a lot of iPad Safari traffic are building phase two of their tablet Web strategy.

The first wave of development was a Band-Aid solution for making video work, the second wave is changing the CSS of the site to make the style optimized for touch-screen devices.

There is also a new breed of applications coming from technology platforms such as Sencha, Strobe and Sprout which are supporting the development of HTML5 applications.

These HTML5 applications can compete with native applications and potentially deliver the same immersive experience, just as the NPR site that mirrors its iPad application.

Effect for advertisers

All these changes have a big effect on ad strategy. Especially since Nielsen studies have shown the iPad owners are more open to ads and more likely to take an action based upon seeing an ad.

Apple iPad users are already reporting higher click-through-rates on video pre-roll than iPhone or Android.

Advertisers need to think about delivering iPad-compatible creative on desktop ad buys, and taking advantage of tablet-specific ad units which maximize the touch-screen and tablet experience to deliver true engagement with consumers on this highly personal device.

How would tablet ads in the browser be different from what is currently being served up? More native features are coming to the browser.

For example, in iOS 4.2 the iPhone and iPad both got access to the accelerometer in their Safari browsers.

If the marketer is looking to extend its advertising from print, desktop or mobile, then it will need to think about what the iPad can bring to the campaign that may not have originally been thought through in the creative brief.

Take the size of the ad into consideration.

One great thing for iPad applications advertising has been that the original artwork for print ads are correctly sized and work great for tablets, especially if the ads are preloaded with content.

However, over-the-air delivery on tablets more than 3G will mean compromises on image quality and image sizes, increasing the need to work with partners that can optimize delivery to devices.

If the marketer is not going with full-screen ads that are big enough to have legible ad copy, then think about adjusting the size of the text in the ad so that it is not too small when the page is resized for the tablet screen in both portrait and landscape.

Marketers should think through the entire experience.

Do they think they can deliver a pre-roll without risking abandonment, or would they consider an interstitial ad between video selection and the video play?

Will they run ads on the page or have them hover on the page so that they may stay in focus after pinch-and-zoom?

Will they use rich video-like animations or light key-frame animations?

Could their navigation work better with gestures or tilts, instead of links or buttons?

Optimizing for the tablet browser

In-application tablet advertising campaigns were an ad innovation playground in 2010.

Tablet browser ads are different, but not because of the technology used to develop them, since both tablet application and tablet browser ads can be delivered via HTML.

The difference is that tablet browser HTML ads will be showing up on a site hosted with the same content management system and ad serving infrastructure as the site you would pull up on your laptop or television.

The more thought that marketers put into creating tablet browser ads that people like to interact with in 2011, the more likely they are to see tablet formats emerge as the leader for all digital display delivered across platforms such as desktop, tablets and mobile.

We are still a bit early in terms of awareness of the potential for tablet browsers, but momentum will build from the press event on Feb. 2 when Google officially demoed Android's first real tablet operating system, Honeycomb, and emphasized the power of the tablet's Web browser for delivering multimedia experiences.

Soon thereafter, the iPad 2 announcement will bring whole lot more hype to tablets in general, and Research In Motion's BlackBerry Playbook will keep the tablet chatter level high all the way through the summer.

To be clear, I expect much of the tablet conversation in 2011 to continue to hail tablet application development like we did in 2010.

But while marketers are waiting for all of those applications to download, they might want to ask publishers just how big their tablet browser traffic is now and where they think it will be at the end of the year.

Whatever killer applications launch in 2011, we still know that in terms of usage the tablet browser is the No. 1 one tablet application.

[Reference link companion to this column.](#)

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