

# What next for the WAP debacle?

WAP, one of the most touted and most maligned technologies has unrealised potential, writes Brett Rolfe.

LITTLE more than a year ago, WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) was just a blip on the radar.

But what a promising blip it was. A digital communication channel delivered right to the mobile phone—a device carried by almost half the Australian population everywhere they go.

Personalisable, targetable, location-sensitive, immediate. You name the buzzword, WAP met the brief.

This was the marketing communications platform to revolutionise the advertising industry (unless of course you were a traditional ad-dinosaur, still believing this Internet thing is a passing fad).

And then, when the hype began to clear out, reality checked in. A couple of advertisers got their hands on the hardware and went WAP-surfing. Overseas trials ran in Europe and the US and the strategic reports began to roll in.

"Despite the current hype surrounding wireless advertising to date, the opportunities it presents are extremely limited."—Jupiter, April 2000.

"I look at wireless devices as an advertising platform and I laugh."—Forrester, May 2000.

"Don't bet the farm on wireless advertising."—Current

Analysis, March 2000.

"Nobody predicts great things from WAP anymore,"—Jakob Nielsen, July 2000.

The WAP bubble had burst. There was no golden goose here, WAP would be lucky to rustle-up a bronze duck. Advertisers could only maintain their positive attitude for a fixed number of seminars before packing up their WAP PowerPoint presentations and calling it a day.

But was all really lost? Of course not! Just as the initial hype about the marketing value of the WAP channel had been exaggerated, so had the backlash. There is value in this channel as a marketing communications tool. But to identify the real opportunities, it's first necessary to go back and

where, making this platform all about utility.

WAP today has all the rich media song and dance potential of a brick. And this is where advertising gets into trouble. The Internet allowed the same creative concepts that were developed for TVCs and print ads to be shoehorned into 468 by 60 pixel banners. WAP gives no such ground.

The easy answer is to disregard it, to assign it to the too-hard basket. Or, better still, to do nothing now but herald the mobile access of tomorrow—streaming video to your mobile phone: Web meets iTV, meets mobile access, brought to you by third-generation mobile devices.

However, the braver solution

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look at the mechanisms of WAP itself.

Wireless, Internet-based technology is one of the clearest examples of convergence currently in the marketplace. Convergence is the meeting of two distinct technologies, in this case mobile phones and Internet browsers. As the communications power of mobile devices increased in step with processing power, it became viable to deliver digital material to mobile users via this platform.

As the first generation of this technology, the current WAP platform is clunky at best. With Neolithic dial-up speeds necessitating noticeable delays between page-views, and heavily pixilated, one-colour LCD displays, WAP was definitely not the Internet on your phone.

It is, however, something altogether new. WAP is a mobile technology that allows anyone to access anything, any-

is to find ways to utilise the tools at our disposal today. To leverage our understanding of the brand, the consumer and the technology to turn this communications channel into a powerful marketing tool.

The key is to see the WAP channel as a non-media channel. It is personal data access technology; a tool for enhancing business productivity and making your personal life that much easier. It is an immediate and targeted information source providing the vital data you need specifically for your location—from the current stock price of your employer to the screening times for *Charlie's Angels*. Here is a technology that will capture the hearts and minds of Gen Y and beyond.

When using a WAP phone, it is the sole focus of your attention, however briefly. It is servant to your needs and there is no room for unsolicited adver-

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Rolfe: WAP is suited to 'advertising in disguise'.

tising in such a space.

This sketch illustrates both the dangers and the potential of this medium. No, we cannot generate massive revenue by selling space to random advertisers on WAP portals. No, we cannot splash our brand indiscriminately on hot properties. This will not endear us to the customer. On the other hand, if positioned correctly, this medium will let the customer bring the brand closer to their heart than perhaps any other tool.

There are a number of ways that brands can successfully introduce themselves into the WAP space, even given its current germinal state. Such techniques could fall under the heading of "advertising in disguise". While they do not look like a 30-second TVC, they serve to build and strengthen the customer's personal relationship with the brand.

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WAP: Back lash was exaggerated.



25 days, 12 hrs



2 hrs, 15 min

## Email Marketing Insight #1: Speed

Email marketing is fast. Not only to deliver, but to produce. An email campaign can be written, designed, sent and received in just hours, not days. It's the power to truly communicate with customers. To build a rapport, keep them right up to date and even make special, time-sensitive offers. And with email, you can test offers and creative and have a result the very same day. So don't waste a second more, visit [www.returnity.com.au](http://www.returnity.com.au) now for your free copy of our 10 Best Email Marketing Practices. Or call us today on (02) 8213 3000.

