THE MOBILE WEB

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The Mobile Web refers to the use of Internet-connected applications, or browser-based access to the Internet from a mobile device - such as a smartphone or tablet PC - connected to a wireless network.

Traditionally, access to the Web has been via fixed-line services. However the Web is becoming more accessible by portable and wireless devices. In 2008 an important milestone in the transition from fixed to mobile Web use was reached when mobile access to the Internet exceeded desktop computer-based access for the first time. In fact, the shift to mobile Web access has been accelerating since 2007 with the rise of larger form factor multitouch smartphones, and more recently since 2010 with the emergence of multitouch tablet computers. Both platforms are more conducive to Internet access and better browser- or application-based user Web experiences than have been afforded by previous generations of mobile devices.

The distinction between mobile Web applications and native applications is anticipated to become increasingly blurred, as mobile browsers gain direct access to the hardware of mobile devices (including accelerometers and GPS chips), and the performance of browser-based applications improve (speed- and capability-wise). Persistent storage and access to sophisticated user interface graphics functions may further reduce the need for the development of platform-specific native applications.

Once users are unable to differentiate between native and mobile web applications, the Mobile Web will refer generically to web access or use of Internet-connected apps from a mobile device.

Mobile Web access today still suffers from interoperability and usability problems. Interoperability issues stem from the platform fragmentation of mobile devices, mobile operating systems, and browsers. Usability problems are centered around the small physical size of the mobile phone form factors (limited resolution screens and user input/operating limitations).