



Stanford eCorner

What is Truly Mobile?

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Serial entrepreneur Cyriac Roeding states that mobile is different because smart phones are the only interactive medium that we currently carry in non-interactive environments. He also challenges the logic of touting mobile to mean being able to do things we can already do "anywhere and anytime."



Transcript

What I finally came about was this idea that people always answer like when you ask an entrepreneur what is mobile about your startup. You probably have heard that many times before. It's the - you can now do this or that, anywhere and anytime. Who of you has heard that argument before? You can now do this or that anywhere and anytime, and that's why it's great. Okay, so if somebody says you can now do this or that, also anywhere and anytime. That essentially means you could already do it before, correct? By definition that is not a new idea. You basically took something we already know and you transferred it to a new medium. That can't be it. If this is a new medium, it has to have its own ideas. So when I went to KP and I was part of this iFund, there were 5,000 business plans that had been submitted in six months.

And I went through a lot of these business plans and I was looking for the next cool thing that I could do. And I was really motivated. I wanted to find something. And I put a very important first filter on every plan I looked at which was: does this idea work nicely without a cell phone? And if the answer was yes, I would pass. Does that make sense? If this works nicely without a cell phone, it is by definition not mobile. Therefore it needs to not be done. What is mobile video without mobile, anybody? What? It's called YouTube. And what is mobile social networking without mobile, Facebook. In other words, if you believe these companies are smart, I wouldn't bet against that, they should own this space. There is absolutely no reason they shouldn't and we don't need another mobile social networking company.

So what doesn't make sense without a cell phone, that's the question. What's simply impossible? And that led me to the insight which I still believe in to this day, what is truly uniquely mobile. The answer to that question that I gave myself is that this phone is the only interactive medium that you carry with you in a non-interactive physical environment. Let me say that again. Smartphones are the only interactive medium that you carry with you in a non-interactive physical environment. So for example, this table is completely offline here, right? It's an offline thing. It's wood until I put this on top of it. And now there is some sort of digital layer on it, some interactive layer. So in other words, the touchable physical world becomes an interactive place. And that is fascinating because the desktop makes about 0.000001% of the world an interactive place, namely your desk.

And this makes about 70% of the land masses an interactive place.