Book review

The mobile revolution

Dan Steinbock

Kogan Page, London, 2005, ISBN 07494 42964; 296pp; hardback; £25

This is one of those books that is actually far more than the blurb on the back cover. It is described as ‘the first comprehensive account of the explosion of mobile services’.

It definitely appears to be all that: coverage appears to be genuinely worldwide. It includes some initially surprising tidbits — such as the fact that China is now the leading country market for mobile services. It provides a good and reasonably detailed overview, as far as this reviewer is concerned, of all the major technological developments in the area, both past and likely in the not too distant future.

Also in its favour is the fact that the author doesn’t write — as some Americans have a tendency to — as though the US market and way of doing things is the norm and everything else is but deviation from that. It is a point that has often struck me as important when faced with yet another presentation about how lessons from US direct marketing can/should be transplanted directly into Europe. Our economic and social infrastructure has evolved very differently, in line with different politics and different geographies. Nowhere is this more apparent than in telecommunications. US citizens, with access to cheap or free local calls have developed a very different relationship

with the telephone by comparison with Europeans.

Difference, rather than normative behaviour, is again the case with regard to the Far East — and not all difference represents a lesson to be learnt. The Japanese way of doing things has led to a growth in digital mobile services that is unlikely to be repeated elsewhere. Steinbock is not afraid to say this: different markets call for different treatments, and sometimes different markets are, well, just different. Interesting for the outsider, but not capable of wider replication.

I have described this book as comprehensive. In a sense, I have no way of knowing how true this is. Steinbock is the expert here: and I was learning as I read. If he has omitted some vast and specialised area of mobile development, then I have no way of knowing. But I don’t believe he has. With my own, more limited knowledge of the subject area, I noticed no great omissions: the book is logically constructed.

The book also has a marketing focus, which is very pleasing. There has been a tendency, over the last few years, for writers in this area to go all ‘techno gung-ho’. They are overwhelmed by the cleverness of it all — and too easily start to write a

technical manual, rather than a book that is accessible to the general marketer. Steinbock makes the point that one cannot understand what is happening in the mobile telephone industry without considering the interplay of technological and *marketing* innovation (my emphasis). It is a key point to understanding many markets — and, sadly, one that is all too often overlooked.

If you want a good basic understanding of how the mobile telecomms industry has evolved over the last few years, you could do a lot worse than purchase this book. And for a paradigm of how to analyse both the technological and marketing components of an industry, I think this book works very well.

John Ozimek
Managing Editor