

# Happy 10th Birthday Mobility!

## What Makes Us Tick

By John Fardoulis

We usually talk about the product personality of a phone, or customer personality, but here's a little insight into the personality of this magazine.

Those who aren't interested can skip this section, it's not too much of an indulgence to delve into once every decade.

Commentary originally started off reviewing industry highlights (and lowlights) over the last decade, but then there wasn't enough space to cover *Mobility's* journey. After all, it's a ten year anniversary that prompted the walk down memory lane.

So here goes...

### Trade Secrets

Maybe I'm slightly paranoid in letting too many secrets out, as a number of things we do have been copied over the years. You know what they say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

In reality though, by the time an edition of the magazine comes out, it's ancient history for us, as we're already well into the next one by the time printing and distribution take place.

### Our Magazine

The mobile sector is tough and complex. A big \$12 billion-plus business but probably one of the most complicated sectors around. Customers have to decide on more than just gadgets but also a tariff plan. In the past most tariffs were designed by accountants for accountants, making it almost impossible for most consumers to truly find the right deal.

Quite frankly, some have found selecting a mortgage easier than picking the best mobile plan. Our industry has pretty much left it like that on purpose - so consumers can't compare too directly.

Publishing is also a tough business, needing a buy-in on at least three levels, from readers, industry stakeholders for content, and advertisers.

Readers basically justify it all, but revenue primarily comes from advertising.

### Sales Core

It's no secret that a large proportion of our readers are sales people, so the magazine is written with this in mind, generally breaking down techno-babble into plain English - getting to the point as much as possible.

*Mobility* is a custom trade publication specifically created for the mobile sector. Our focus is generally on pre-sales, as expert readers can review products and services for themselves once commercially available. What we do is take prototypes, pre-production or beta versions of products/services, identifying and explaining highlights, not just in words but creating extensive visuals, which aid in understanding.

With this in mind, the magazine is designed to be a practical resource rather than a literary masterpiece. We prefer simple language, using small rather than big words where possible. Plain English, with minimal techno-babble.

Words are adapted at times, sometimes using phrases that don't officially exist in that context in dictionaries. Using the word 'ruggedised' for example, when explaining splash and dust resistant phones. Getting to the point is more important than literary issues.

Linking features to true advantages is also paramount; converting features into benefits. Learning how to explain, in language your mum can understand, why a particular advantage is worthwhile. Practicing how to summarise a concept so it fits into 160 characters - actually keying as an SMS to keep the summary concise.

### Inside Look

Being an active part of the industry/mobile community has always been important, and sets us apart from other media run by outsiders. I know I've literally met thousands of people at functions over the years, and our event pages are testimony to this.

Magazines, web sites and blogs come and go all the time. Most specialist consumer publications fail because readers only need to change mobiles every couple of years or so. Apart from a miniscule geek minority, there's no reason for people to read such a title month-in, month-out. Our scope is different, publishing for the trade - meaning readers are interested every day of the week because what they do for a living is tied in with mobiles.

It can be a tough crowd at times though, as readers employed in the mobile sector need to learn about things they don't already know. They don't want to put up with rehashed press releases or a product review three months after they've actually been selling a phone.

That's how our product 'Previews' are different, with us basically being a surrogate, providing an inside look for tens of thousands of mobile sales people - before they get access to the product. Once a new model's on sale, most of our readers can check it out for themselves.

And publishing is very labour intensive. Every word has to be written, most products need a minimum of a couple of week's testing, then we have to create graphics showing what a product's really like from the inside. For us, a picture's actually worth more than a thousand words.

With a lot of our audience being time-poor salespeople - we can't faff around, so pictures help get to the point, rather than too much text. Having said that, a lot of effort goes into captions explaining graphics. Comprehension is really important and visuals, plus attention to detail help understanding.

We manually create most screen grabs, as vendors rarely have support material anywhere near as comprehensive. Most would be lucky to have a single 'real' screen grab on the display of a studio product shot.

You'll probably know I like hand-drawn diagrams when explaining things in primers, right down to stick figured people. Often in these cases we undertake a teaching role.

Stock product photos are so easy to get off the internet these days, almost anyone can grab a product shot and fluffy press release and say they've reviewed a unit - in many (surprisingly many) cases without even seeing the phone!

About five years ago we noticed this happening and published a piece saying to look for actual screen grabs as a way of differentiating between real and 'fake' reviews.

### Adding Value

Some newbie marketing managers have trouble understanding our magazine. 99.9999% of advertising and PR agencies don't understand *Mobility* either. Probably because we're unique, they find it hard to imagine how we're in touch with the sales process and sales people.

They're more comfortable with 'conventional' advertising agency hype revolving around the equivalent of second hand statistics from third hand sources, based on sample sizes smaller than the number of guests at a Greek wedding. Try and link actual sales to any of it and brains begin to hurt.

Knowing our readers by name is a lot more powerful, a unique phenomenon that some boffins don't get. Being in touch with so many movers and shakers in such a high-powered industry - on a first name basis - is very rare.

One senior manager or salesperson in our community can be more influential than a thousand consumers - buying a mobile once every two years.

Quite frankly, in-store sales consultants are our most powerful constituents. If a salesperson speaks to half a dozen customers a day, five and a half days a week - this is quality time with nearly 1500 consumers looking to buy each year.

Multiply that by tens of thousands of sales people who read the magazine and material connects with people advising many millions of consumers on a face-to-face basis each year.

### Changing Face

People are more important than technology and the mobile landscape has really changed, particularly in retailing and service provision.

Service providers (SP's) used to be abundant, bringing hundreds, perhaps thousands of new dealers into the market. Barriers to entry were really low. Some people only needed guts and a lease to gain a dealer code and open up shop.

Consolidation has since taken place in retail and provider land, meaning hundreds, perhaps thousands of small outlets have now closed.

### Memory Lane

As a way of remembering a lot of history, I've selected twenty covers from over the last ten years and listed associated thoughts. It's a bit of a walk down memory lane, starting with some of the most recent editions and going back to the beginning.

See how many you remember!

The fact that they seem to be more stylish over the last couple of years hasn't just come about by chance. Lifestyle elements are important in supporting what we now depend on as a 'life management tool' - hence a desire to visually represent this on the front cover of the magazine.

There's a lot of history captured by *Mobility* over the last decade. Perhaps we need to allocate space for industry 'blasts from the past' on a regular basis.

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This was 'my' cover, without the involvement of any product or vendor. It communicates a human element that some have been missing, and is still one of my all time favourites.



'Reflecting' on a trend of shiny handsets, this cover was bright and upbeat. Our matt cello coating made it a cover with a touchy, feely appeal as well.



LG showed initiative by recruiting Sophie Monk as their spokesmodel for 'Shine'. Identified as an entertainer with a 'Shiny' personality, she appeared in advertising and point of sale materials.



This cover from two years ago was a bit different. Subtly stylish, with dark tones and curves it matched product inspiration. A premium message was communicated without shouting from the rooftops.



There's one word that comes to mind with this Motorola cover, 'beautiful'. It proves that a great lifestyle image is almost priceless.



This cover was so much of a scoop, that a product manager hand delivered a phone sample at 8am on a Saturday morning, straight off a plane from Singapore. We went to press at 7am that Mon morning.



It seems as though there are more Nokia fashion covers than from anyone else. Each is at least a year apart though. This is from the launch of the L'Amour collection early in 2006.



LG's U880 was one of the first in slim, fashionable 3g phones. We worked together in finding the right lifestyle image to visually communicate this.



Nokia lined up pro photographer shots from their (part body painted) mobile couture fashion parade. I happened to be in the right place at the right time, snapping this shot, which we preferred.



i-Mode was a great idea in principle but perhaps suffered the same fate as Beta VCRs. Still, few have done better in launching a content ecosystem better than i-Mode in Japan.



Siemens launched a nice range of phones, including a ruggedised sports model, just before they withdrew from the market. This cover was a bit like a send-off for them.



The E700 and Samsung's T500 'Flaunt' women's phone put them in the limelight as a serious player in the fashion segment. It was also when Samsung began to gain prominence as a mobile brand in general.



Sony Ericsson's T610i was an iconic product that really put the joint venture company between Sony and Ericsson on the map. Design was well ahead of its time.



Nokia's 7210 was one of the early fashion phones with a colour screen and vibrant poly ring tones. Being a good mid sized unit, plus changeable covers made it a hip phone at the time.



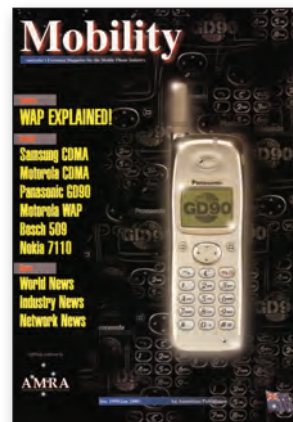
Back in 2001, this is the first edition where we changed the format of the magazine to a large, 'trade' size. We went from A4 to an oversize format, the size you see today.



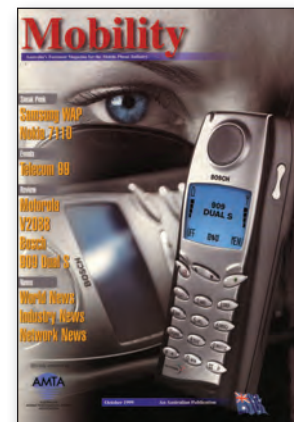
In 2000, One Tel's launch of their own network was a big deal. They were ahead of the game as far as 'cool services' but problems with management controls meant their demise.



This phone brings back a lot of memories. Ericsson launched it in the snow at Mt Bulla. Testing included a day on the snow and helicopter ride back to Melbourne airport. The good 'ol days!



Panasonic's GD88 was one of the lightest phones at the time, making it a hit for the Japanese vendor. How the landscape has now changed, with fewer phone brands in our market due to consolidation.



This cover is another favourite. It's great how the blue eye matched blue backlighting in the phone screen. Perhaps one of the first handsets with a brushed metal finish as well?



And finally, the cover that started it all in 1998. Back then mobile Service Providers were prominent, how times have changed.