

Video over LTE in March is Madness

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On Thursday, I tuned in to the Wisconsin Badger's first game in the NCAA basketball tournament on a Nokia Icon from Verizon. The phone was a review unit, so I didn't watch for long, but I have to admit that I was impressed by the quality of the picture. In fact, I had a little bit of an epiphany around video on mobile.

If you've heard Lowell McAdam speak lately, you've probably come away with at least one, glaring message: VIDEO IS THE FUTURE. Believe me when I say, I WANT TO BELIEVE, but I've been skeptical that there is any reason to watch video on my phone over LTE for more than the length of a YouTube clip. My experience watching the Badgers bury American University on Thursday on the Icon's 5-inch screen might have just changed my ideas about video on mobile for good. Here's a few takeaways from that experience:

LTE makes all the difference

Verizon's LTE provides beautiful, crisp video indoors. In the few minutes we watched, there was no buffering. On a 5-inch screen, the end user experience is on par with watching cable TV. Occasionally there was a little bit of pixelation, but nothing that detracted from the viewing experience.

Video is a premium service

While McAdam might be preaching video as the next growth area for Verizon, I'm pretty sure the majority of consumers can't afford to fund that dream. Perhaps the

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main reason I won't be watching more basketball games over LTE is that the price is prohibitive. In Verizon's data plan calculator, I entered just 10 minutes of streaming video per day (300 minutes per month) and left all other fields—email, texts, Web browsing—empty. Verizon figured I would need a 10 GB plan to meet my needs. If you figure your average basketball game runs about 2 hours, you could watch about 2.5 games per month on 10 GB of data.

Sports really are the sweet spot for video over LTE

It is not by coincidence that Verizon (NFL), AT&T (MLB) and Sprint (NASCAR) have struck up partnerships with professional sports. Live sporting events are the sweet spot for anywhere/anytime video. No one wants to miss the game they've waited all week to see but few have complete control over the real world commitments that intrude on a weekend (i.e. school functions, travel etc.). While the average user may not sit down and watch the entire game on their mobile, they may tune in from the taxi on their way to the hotel.

Wi-Fi no longer reigns supreme

As much as I prefer connecting to my Wi-Fi at home to being on a cellular connection, that's not as true when in public or here at the office. In my experience, public Wi-Fi, whether at Starbucks or the airport, is taxed to the limit and so agonizingly slow as to be almost useless. More often than not, I find that I am turning off my Wi-Fi and switching to LTE in order to load a Web page or check email. Because people are paying for their data plans, LTE often offers a better quality of service than Wi-Fi.

Broadcast LTE to the rescue?

While video over LTE is currently too expensive for the average consumer to do much more than video "snacking" it remains to be seen if technologies like Broadcast LTE will offer a more efficient way of delivering video to customers. While LTE is most certainly capable of delivering a quality experience, carriers are going to have to come up with business models that can support the delivery of content in a way that actually makes it a growth opportunity.

Go Badgers!

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