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This document was created in July of 2007 as a means of presenting the findings of research about the use of Amp'd Live.

The purpose of this document is to present a thorough analysis of the successes and areas of improvement for Amp'd Live. This document will act as a guideline for the philosophical and structural changes that need to be realized within Amp'd Live in order to ensure the Amp'd brand reflects a unique, innovative, and captivating user experience that is the best in its class.

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Research was conducted by the Amp'd Mobile UI Design Team (past and present) with help from Amp'd Marketing, including Sce Pike, Quinn Simpson, Jennifer Phannguyen, Josh Schoenwald, and Barika Croom. Thanks also to all those who shared their stories with us to help create this analysis.

Interviews and Observations

In the beginning of May 2007 the UI team conducted about 20 interviews with (primarily) Amp'd employees about their habits when using Amp'd Live. The goal of these interviews was to gain a true sense and firsthand account of how people use their phones. More than a survey (which have their own merits and drawbacks), we wanted to watch people using their phones and to talk to them about habits and areas where Amp'd Live did and didn't seem to meet their needs.

In order to understand how to build a successful design, it is important to understand the habits and uses of your intended audience. While surveys and focus groups are important components to this process, there is no substitute for gaining firsthand knowledge through direct observations. Very often a user's account of their own behavior and motives is inaccurate or at the very least incomplete. Observations allow this discrepancy to be understood; furthermore they allow opportunities for researchers to probe for more details in particularly interesting situations. These observations, coupled with the focus group and survey results as well as our team's own expertise provided all the necessary tools to compile this analysis.

Overall the interviews were enlightening, but they also confirmed some suspicions we had about how & when people use Amp'd Live based on our own experiences. Most people we spoke with said they use Amp'd Live only in situations where they have nothing else to do, so essentially it's a last resort for them. Many admitted to not really using Amp'd Live outside of work because they just didn't have a reason to. This should not indicate that Amp'd Live has no appeal in the market place, but rather that its appeal can be greatly enhanced; and there is enormous potential to do this.

People indicated that although they liked the general look and feel, they would quickly trade that for easier navigation and faster load / refresh times. Additionally, features like push-to-phone need to work more seamlessly and with better reliability.

Although these particular interviews are not indicative of our entire core subscribers, they still represent a large part of our target demographic. It's important to note that our target demographic and core subscribers may not be perfectly aligned. Additionally, usage patterns may be inflated from that of paying customers due to the fact most interviewees were employees and thus were not paying for service. Summaries of our interviews are included below.



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Interviews and Observations

The online survey was available to Amp'd subscribers in the Spring of 2007. We received just under 100 responses. The questions ranged from specific Amp'd Live usage questions to general phone usage behavior.

Overall the results we saw were consistent with our other findings; mainly that:

1. People use Amp'd Live when they're bored.
2. People want Amp'd Live to be faster
3. There is a significant amount of latent functionality.
4. People want their phone to serve them better.

Below is a link to the survey results.



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Focus Groups

The Marketing and UI departments traveled to New York, Dallas, and Los Angeles in September and October of 2006 to conduct user focus groups. The focus groups involved a group discussion with 3-10 participants at a time regarding their use of Amp'd Live, their likes and dislikes, their wish-lists, etc. Participants reflected Amp'd's target demographic and declared themselves to be medium to heavy Amp'd Live users.

Topics discussed:

- How they heard about Amp'd Live
- Reasons for accessing Amp'd Live
- Primary methods of navigating through Amp'd Live (browse, search, etc.)
- Places/situations Amp'd Live is accessed
- Comments on content offerings
- Ease of use finding content
- Most used features (of Amp'd Live and of device)
- Dual delivery mechanism (Web and Handset) and preference
- Delivery options (download vs. stream)
- Acceptable plan costs
- Their definitions of mobile entertainment
- Their idea of the future of mobile entertainment

All participants stated they used Amp'd Live during breaks in their day, while waiting in lines, on the subway, etc. A surprising amount said they also used Amp'd Live/ the Internet for specific tasks such as reading email, logging on to school websites for homework, etc.

The most popular discussions; however were about content offerings and prices. They discussed which offerings they liked and which ones they did not like. Participants were very opinionated about content, such as full shows vs. clip issues, content prices being too expensive (games) and wish-lists for more mature content.

Consensus on navigating through Amp'd Live was that it was fairly straightforward but slow. Participants described a healthy balance between searching and browsing, depending on their needs. A majority said naming conventions for content were inadequate and not descriptive. Participants also had a lot to say regarding hardware issues such as broken phones, future phones, etc.

Overall, users expressed satisfaction with Amp'd Live and its unique offerings. A more detailed analysis from these sessions is attached below.



Amp'd UI Research Focus Group Findings



The following indicators can be used to measure the relevance and value of a given application or service in the mobile space. These parameters are broken down into three categories. These indicators come as the result of analyzing our research and understanding at a fundamental level what creates a success.

Category A depicts essential requirements to give adequate value to the product. These are requirements that must be met in order to assure that the product is relevant to the mobile space and will be adopted by users. The means by which these requirements are satisfied defines the User Interface of the product. The word "information" can be replaced by other relevant terms such as product, service, feature, etc.

Category B guidelines must be met in order to differentiate the product from competition and allow the product to really stand out in a class by itself. It's worth noting that these are guidelines in the sense that they are not requirements (as opposed to Category A) for adoption, but they become requirements for success which is not predicated on merely meeting the status quo. Products that meet all these guidelines are best-of-breed award winners. The iPod is one of the best examples of this, as is Adobe Photoshop.

Category C parameters are not necessarily required for adoption or standalone success, although they do have a significant impact. Satisfying these parameters can help your product, but it won't sustain success if the other requirements are not met. Because Category C parameters are often specific to a particular domain, it's impossible to list them all out.



Category A Requirements

1A: Providing information that people want

Simply put, if people don't want it, they're not going to take it for free, let alone buy it. Figuring out 'what people want' is difficult, but through market research, interviews, and analyses, patterns emerge which point to design successes.

2A Providing that information quickly, easily, and reliably

This is another simple requirement but is often overlooked, especially the reliable aspect. If something isn't available quickly and painlessly or isn't reliable, usage will be poor and confidence will be low. The amount of hassle people are willing to endure, or time people are willing to wait is directly proportional to the product's performance on the other three Category A requirements, and to a much lesser extent performance on Category B and C requirements.

3A Providing the information in situations where it would otherwise be extremely difficult or impossible to obtain or use

Apart from providing something that people want, satisfying this requirement is particularly important to the mobile space because it requires that the product is more relevant when used on/with a mobile phone than without one. A good example of this is a built-in camera because with a mobile phone pictures can be shared easily from a phone. A poor example would be a separate application for sending SMS that doesn't integrate seamlessly with the native operating system of the phone.

4A Providing the information in situations where the information is still desired and valuable

Satisfying Requirement 3A is useless without this requirement. Just because information can be accessed in a particular situation doesn't mean it makes sense for that situation. This requirement should be specifically evaluated to assure that the information is relevant to the mobile space.

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Category B Guidelines

1B Doing something easily that hasn't been done well (or at all) before

Satisfying this guideline creates a distinction in the market for this product. Because there is little cross-pollination in the mobile phone industry as compared to the Internet; this can often have little effect since switching phone carriers is often a large obstacle. Still, there is marketing value for attracting new customers looking for a new carrier and retaining current customers.

2B Doing something far better than anyone else is doing

Even if you're not the first to market with a particular product, that's no reason to think you can't be successful if you do something far and away above the competition. Again, Apple proved this point with the success they've had with the iPod, and are poised to try it again with the iPhone.

3B Providing a visually compelling experience which complements the UI and enhances the desirability

A product should also be visually appealing and appropriate for the brand. Here is an example where Amp'd's Music ID application passes with all flags flying and Mobile IM really falls flat. Visual design is a necessary component to communicate the brand, establish individuality, and improve the user experience.

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Category C Parameters

1C Doing something that seems impossible or that nobody thought could be done reasonably

While satisfying this parameter is not essential for adoption or success, it can help both if it applies. This parameter is part of what defines true innovation.

2C Doing something in a completely different way than anyone thought could be done

This is another part of how a truly innovative product or service is defined.

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Music ID

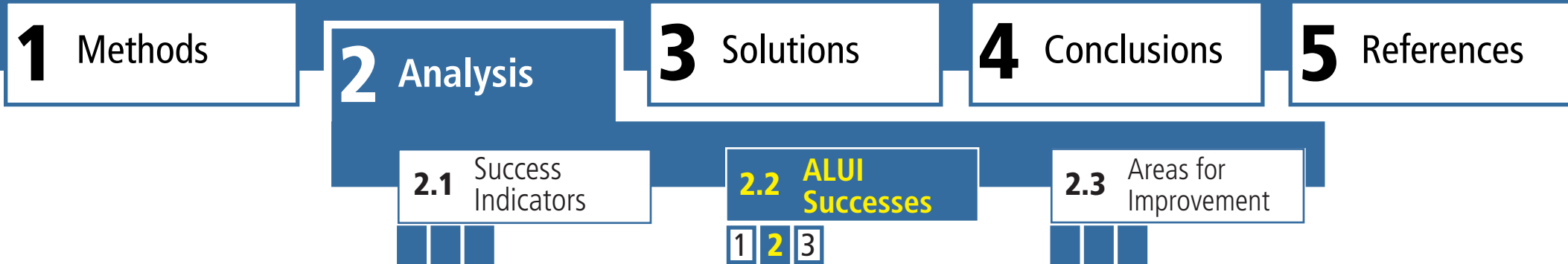
Amp'd Music ID application is one of the best applications released in the mobile space. It is successful because it fills a need that people have, while being incredibly easy to use. People listen to music all the time, it's everywhere: on television, on their car radio, in a shopping mall, at a movie, etc. In most public settings it's impossible or very difficult to find out what you're listening to, and this application makes it easy to do just that, as well as buy the song with 2 clicks if it's available—all you need is your Amp'd phone with you.

It fills the need because it works well within the parameters of relevance—i.e. when you're mobile; or any time you're away from a computer. This application would be of limited to no use as a downloadable computer application for this reason, because in this context it doesn't offer something you can't get more easily and cheaply. As a utility, Music ID performs exceedingly well on all of the Category A Requirements. It is because of this that Music ID is of value to customers enough so that they're willing to pay for this service. But it also succeeds on all Category B Guidelines which elevate this application to best-of-breed status.

These successes really take the application to the next level, and make it a true standout; people go "wow!" when they hear about this. It even succeeds on Parameter C1 by doing something that seems almost impossible. Even though Amp'd was not the first carrier to deploy this type of application, it was the first carrier to provide a complete service offering including the ability to purchase a song once it has been identified.

This is the type of thing for which Apple is renowned. One could imagine Apple touting a service like this that lets you identify songs from your iPhone and purchase them from the iTunes Store. Also, it is success on these last parameters that skyrocket the application's marketability and allow it to soar above mediocrity and make it a truly great application. This is why Music ID has been one of the top 2 applications downloaded every month since August of 2006 (2 months after it was released).

For further comparison, consider the Mobile IM application that Amp'd sells. The application meets all of the Category A Requirements. This is why people are willing to pay for it. But the application fails rather miserably at all of the second-level Guidelines; it doesn't do something that nobody else is doing, it doesn't do something better than what else is out there, and the visual design is rather abysmal. The reason it's used at all is the same reason that MySpace is one of the most accessed web sites on our phones: users want to be connected to their peers who are also connected, and this is a key means to achieve that. With MySpace and Mobile IM, success is seen in spite of the UI, not because of it. While this does enable Amp'd to say "We have mobile IM on our phones," or "We have MySpace on our phones", it is far from the level of quality that we should aspire to create and deliver to our customers, especially if we desire to differentiate ourselves in the market place.



New (Medio) Search

Plain and simple, the new search application makes it a lot easier to appreciate the size of our offering and figure out quickly if something is there or isn't there. Not only does it help users get to what they want in a fraction of the time it would otherwise take them, but it helps with discovery since as a user is typing, the results are updated in real time, giving a glimpse at some other content they may not have known about.

Additionally, searching by artists A to Z can be accomplished much more quickly with the new search application as opposed to browsing the Amp'd Live deck. The one element of browsing the deck that you don't really get with the application is being able to see content broken down into different categories like genres.

The search application satisfies all of the Category A Requirements, especially 1A and 2A. It's interesting to note that Requirement 3A is satisfied by the fact that the search application replaces the old search mechanism, which was more difficult often did not present information in a way that was valuable. The tremendous usage we've seen with this application (which is also one of the most downloaded applications on our deck) is a testament to this fact.

Additionally, the application satisfies Guidelines 1B and 2B, and comes close enough to passable on 3B. Although this is more of a utility application, the benefit to the user is significant since it provides a complete solution better than any other carrier. Nowhere else is it faster to download content thanks to this application.



Streaming live TV & Radio

That our phones can play video is nothing new or particularly intriguing. But in order for our phones to be used as real video devices there needs to be pertinent and reliable video programming, and people need an easy way to get to it. Previously, all of our video programming was delivered through VOD clips scattered throughout Amp'd Live. These clips showed much of the same content as is currently shown on Amp'd TV, but it was more difficult to find, to know when & where to get new clips, etc.

Amp'd TV solves this problem in a few ways. First, you can pay one price to get access to all channels (this will be changing with the advent of the new Gold / Platinum pricing structure), so this means that all channels are located in a single place within Amp'd Live. More importantly, these channels are located within My Stuff so the customer always knows exactly where they're located. Second, providing always-on linear streams removed the need to search through hundreds of clips to find something to watch. While this may seem counterintuitive in that customers have less control over what they see; because much of the usage comes from people who are looking to kill time, faster access to content becomes the most important variable here, and the task of figuring out what to watch is actually a hindrance. Additionally, the breadth of channels ensures that there is always something new to watch.

This creates a situation where users have quick access to a wide array of content that (to general knowledge) is constantly changing. Linear television is attractive because it makes it easy to access for the customer; all they have to do is launch Amp'd TV and watch. If usage begins trending to the point where people are turning to their mobile phones as a source for television (as opposed to a time-killer), then it will become a much bigger issue to ensure that users have control over what they watch and when they watch it (more like the VOD model). As it stands, linear TV is the better solution right now, which explains why linear TV is more popular than VOD clips by about a factor of two. This trend is analogous to what's happening in broadcast television, where VOD content is only now becoming more and more popular.

It is easy to see how the linear TV offering satisfies all of the Category A Requirements, and how it compares to VOD downloads. While VOD downloads offer greater choice and specificity, as compared to linear TV the information is not as easy to get (1A), and it's not as reliable because file naming conventions often make it difficult to know what the clip is about (2A). Linear television doesn't have this issue because there is no inherent expectation that when you turn on Comedy Central, you're going to see a specific clip of last night's episode of The Daily Show.

On their own without comparing them to linear TV, VOD downloads satisfy most of the Category A Requirements with the partial exception of 2A as noted above. But in comparison to linear TV, it's clear that VOD just doesn't stack up quite as well, which is one reason why the usage numbers have declined. That's not to say that VOD has no value, only that its value is less than that of linear TV.

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"I don't show them Amp'd Live because it's slow. I show them My Stuff because I think it's not about saying 'Here's Amp'd Live,' it's about saying: 'Here's what an Amp'd phone can do.' "

The quote above is very telling because it underscores the fact that Amp'd Live as it currently exists is not something cool that you want to show off; it's really what it allows your phone to do that's cool.

We uncovered 3 high-level issues which underscore the areas that we must improve.



Amp'd Live is not indispensable. It's a store.

The crux of the issue is that Amp'd Live today functions as a store. It's a place where you can purchase more content than you can ever imagine, but the experience of actually using Amp'd Live is really more about going and buying the content. Nobody likes to spend hours and hours in a store; they want to get in and buy something and get out. If we continue with the Amp'd Live-as-store model, we're going to end up with more content than our users can ever hope to enjoy, and even with the new search it will be increasingly difficult to make all of this content accessible. By some accounts this is already happening.

Although we sell a lot of content, most of what Amp'd Live is about is just that—selling content, and changing the content doesn't change the fact that it's a store. As it stands, the Amp'd Live-as-store model has some key drawbacks.

These drawbacks explain some of the issues with Amp'd Live as a store today, but they become even more important when thinking about taking Amp'd Live beyond just being a store. These are important components that need to be addressed, because we can't take Amp'd Live beyond being just a store until we can improve its ability to work as one.

Speed

From launching Amp'd Live to moving between pages, the overwhelming majority of feedback corroborated what we had suspected was a major issue: the overall interaction is too slow. Our observations showed that people would consistently avoid certain pages they knew would take a lot longer to load. A common example is launching directly into My Stuff instead of Amp'd Live because you don't have to wait for the promo video to load. Because there is so much content, it takes many pages to get to a particular content ID page. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that going from page to page requires a re-load of the entire page, which initiates a new transition sequence in addition to a network call to retrieve the new list of content. Network latency of course is another factor that slows things down.

Too Much Content

Though it might seem absurd, the amount of content we have is actually a big reason underscoring the perception that Amp'd Live is slow. Because there is so much content and comparatively little space on the screen, organization is paramount to having even a slight chance of finding what you want. But this also means navigating multiple pages of hierarchical categories, or scrolling through extremely long lists. This experience is far inferior to the already-compromised experience of using a computer and large monitor to browse for content.

Our research has found that people are willing to browse exceedingly large catalogs, but the more information there is to sort through, the shorter they're willing to wait to go from page to page. Many people were observed browsing for content on their computer (at ampd.com), finding what they want and then searching for that content directly on the handset to purchase it. Download statistics show that the top 200 or so most downloaded content items account for an overwhelming majority of all the content sold. This is an indication of two things: First, that people are having some difficulty in accessing our entire catalog, and secondly, that there exists a quorum of content needed to validate its utility in the market place. Amp'd has reached this quorum and continues to exceed it, but with diminishing returns. Which is to say, speaking merely of the amount of content we offer (not the different types or delivery methods), Amp'd already has what it takes, and continuing to push the envelope with more and more content will not be as lucrative as continuing to find new outlets for this content (linear TV channels, shows on Comedy Central, etc).

It's important to note that it's really not that we have too much content, but that we have too much content that is capable of being displayed well enough to make it entirely useful in the current user interface.

Continued... 



Barrier to Entry

Part of the uniqueness of Amp'd Live is in the details. It's in the smart graphics and the clever page transitions. It's in the video promotion that plays automatically and the edgy content. All of these features are important differentiators that we should preserve, but they should not come at the expense of usability.

The promotional video is a particularly important component to this. When you launch Amp'd Live, we want to put our best foot forward; we want to show the user that this is something new and different that's going to blow their socks off. The last thing we want to do is get them all the way there and then put up big "WAIT" sign before they're allowed to do anything.

Research shows that reactions were fairly mixed when it came to the promo video. Some people liked the fact that the phone was talking to them, and some people thought it was intrusive and irritating. But across the line, everyone agreed that having to wait for the video to load was a significant sore spot, and they dreaded opening Amp'd Live because in order to do anything they had to wait until the video completed refreshing. We don't want people to dread using Amp'd Live.

Unclear Naming Conventions

Even when getting to a page with content listed on it, ambiguity in naming conventions can make it difficult to tell the difference between items when there are multiple version of something, or when the allotted space doesn't provide enough characters to identify the item. Though it may seem paradoxical, we found that the more trust someone has in knowing the value of a particular content item, the more time they're willing to spend validating that suspicion. Conversely, the less confidence they have in knowing what the content item is, the less time they're willing to spend to find out. Browsing or searching for content is a quest, and people are hesitant to embark or continue on a quest if they believe there's a low probability of finding something useful. This knowledge contradicts the notion that if someone doesn't know what a content item is, "all they have to do is preview it." We need to provide enough information & context for users to be confident in knowing what they're seeing, and what they might see ahead.

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Amp'd Live is a singular experience.

Amp'd's viral videos and short TV clips serve as a mobile version of YouTube, except without the ability to pass along the links to friends. The Amp'd Live experience doesn't lend itself easily to sharing with other people, and this feature is one of the biggest reasons for YouTube's success.

When people use Amp'd Live, almost universally we found that they're alone with their phone. Either they're in a public environment such as a subway or a classroom, or they're by themselves in their car, or even the bathroom. This experience is isolating, since while you are experiencing this content you are shut off from the rest of the world. It's not possible (at least not with Amp'd) to multitask while watching a video or listening to a song, so the opportunity lies in what happens after you watch a video or listen to a song.

The mobile phone is primarily and most importantly a means to communicate with others, so it follows that to the extent possible, Amp'd Live should enable communication rather than hinder it.



The Amp'd Live UI metaphor is stale

The UI navigation scheme is designed such that it invites users to keep going from page to page looking for content. The time it takes to load & refresh pages, along with the number of pages required to get to content slows down the overall speed of Amp'd Live significantly. Part of this perception lies in the fact that there's really nothing on the pages to hold the user's attention aside from a list of content or categories which only invite the user to leave the page to see what's next.

Some pages have a promotional video, but they don't appear on every page and they can only showcase one or two things at a time. On top of that: it takes awhile to load the videos, it's much slower to have to listen to the entire video than to read a line of text or interpret a graphic, and it's not economical or practical to use video as a means of providing information to the user.

However impractical, the promo videos are nonetheless important to the current UI because they are the only real content on each page. Part of the problem is that with regards to Amp'd, the general notion of "content" is limited to a specific item available for streaming or download on our deck. The challenge is to expand our definition of what defines content, and to incorporate more of this directly into the UI.

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The first step to addressing the problem areas is to ensure that Amp'd Live is the best store that it can be. This means more than just making sure it has the best content, but that the content is presented in the best possible way with the best possible access and the fewest number of barriers to purchase.

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Speed

One of the biggest problems lies with the promotional video which refreshes on startup and requires the user to wait for it to finish before Amp'd Live is at all usable (you can't even go into 'My Stuff'). Whether you like or dislike the video itself, we must get away from the "hurry up and wait" model, and allow users to begin using Amp'd Live as soon as it's launched, regardless of whether the promo video is cached or not, or whether a promo video even exists. This is the implementation we have on the Amp'd version of the Motorola Q.

Because of the unreliability of network speeds, it's also important that we optimize the graphics as much as possible for speed. It's still important that they be visually stunning, but that doesn't have to mean endlessly complicated just for the sake of being flashy. People don't purchase page transitions or interface graphics, which means they won't be looking for these elements, so they shouldn't stand out on their own. If they don't contribute directly to the experience they'll only be a distraction. There is no neutral in design (Woods, 2002).

Another cause for slowdown has to do with the number of different network calls that have to be made at various times to validate, authenticate, etc. As much as possible, these network calls should be transparent to someone using Amp'd Live. Whether they occur during 'downtime' (either when Amp'd Live is open but data is not being actively downloaded) or hidden during downloads, they should not stop or slow someone from using Amp'd Live as much as possible.

As people browse Amp'd Live in search of content, we should also strive to pre-load as many content items or category names as is feasible (without causing unnecessary load times). Perhaps this would mean pre-loading a small database of values on the client itself to help with this, being able to predict with some accuracy what someone is looking for, or even the ability to save some information to the client during each session that might help speed up load times for subsequent sessions.

Finally, one of the most important factors is simply to reduce the number of screens it takes to purchase an item. If we can assess that someone is on the path to purchasing something, we should ensure that it's easy and quick to do just that. If we assess that they may be looking for information or trying check the status of something; in other words, if they're looking for 'content' that's not necessarily sitting on the deck waiting to be downloaded, then we should optimize the experience for this.

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Reign in the content

We need to develop better ways of accessing our large catalog that help users utilize the most efficient path to the content they're looking for. Browsing for content is particularly useful with diverse or abbreviated offerings such as Most Popular lists, or greatest hits. Especially with editorial lists, most of the time the only characteristic that all elements of the list have in common is the fact that they're on the same list. This gives value to the list itself, and to allowing people to browse by that list.

While we don't want to prevent people from browsing for content A to Z, for large catalogs this is an extremely inefficient way to find something. Some ways to alleviate this are with a single-layer genre list that lists artists. Once you find an artist, you're taken to that artist's page with all of the content available. In addition, this page could include other useful information like tour or ticket information, discography, latest news, etc. This allows users to get to information more quickly and also gives them more than just song titles.

If a user is looking for something specific, far and away the quickest way to find out if it's available is to do a search. Search needs to be embedded into Amp'd Live in such a way that it is easily discoverable and reliable enough that it's used often. The ability to search only within categories is another key way to allow users to get to what they're looking for quickly.

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Provide Context

Part of the challenge in working on tiny displays is providing enough information on the screen at a given time. In order to display many items at once, you have to reduce the amount of space available for any one item. This increases the likelihood that names will be truncated. Exacerbating this problem at Amp'd is the content that we get from some of our vendors which is either not properly named or have very long names that don't distinguish themselves until well beyond the available characters for the screen.

To solve this, we must be able to provide a quick way to disambiguate items to answer the question "Is this the content I'm looking for?" Jedi Mind Tricks aside, this means understanding the salient features and making them quickly apparent. This might mean quickly displaying the entire name if it's being truncated, displaying a thumbnail view of the content, or providing inline previewing so the user can obtain the necessary context to help them identify the item. At the same time, we must make sure to not lose the context they've generated by requiring them to visit a detail page, then the preview, then back to the detail page, and finally back to the list so they can relocate their place, choose the next item, and repeat the process.

Specifically, when users are at the point of looking for content, it is our responsibility to provide as much information as possible to help them make a decision to purchase. But merely making the information available somewhere is not enough to make it useful; the environment must impart observability (Sarter, et. al 1994) so that users can naturally and effortlessly get all the information they need.

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A critical component of Amp'd Live is its ability to sell individual items, but this is not the only way that Amp'd Live can provide value to our customers. Amp'd is known for having an abundance of content, but this content is for the most part what people enjoy in their spare time; it doesn't engage them, inform them, or inspire them to share it with other people.

Content should be defined as anything that customers aspire to acquire while using their phones. Whether it's the latest Snoop ringtone, the recap from last night's playoff game, directions to happy hour, or a reminder that a new episode of Lil' Bush is premiering on Amp'd TV; all of this is content. We need to provide the best possible access to this information.

The key is to be able to integrate this type of content into the Amp'd Live experience, so it becomes a mixture of content that we sell, information people care about, and services which allow people to access this information. By doing so, the experience of using Amp'd Live becomes much much more than a place to buy stuff; it becomes a mobile headquarters for just about any information people care about. Want to always know who's playing at the Roxy, keep a blog about your cross-country road trip, or see the latest photos from your favorite Flickr group? These are the activities which are defining the "Internet 2.0" and there's no reason why we shouldn't be on the forefront of bringing that type of integration to the mobile space.

In building this type of environment, we need to incorporate burgeoning technologies directly into the experience as well as continuing to offer the best traditional content. In other words, rather than posting a link to Flickr, we allow people to customize their home page with a Flickr stream. Instead of requiring users to visit LiveJournal, allow them to subscribe to their friends' blogs and get notified whenever there are updates. Allow them to buy concert tickets for their favorite band. Let them read user reviews for the restaurant they're walking by while on vacation. In these ways, Amp'd Live becomes synonymous with being connected with your world wherever you are.

Amp'd Live is the biggest differentiator for us. Apart from cheap rates or free phones, Amp'd Live should be the reason people become Amp'd customers. We don't offer the best deals on our phones, we don't have the widest phone selection and we don't have the cheaper-than-cheap rate plans. Our goal should be to make Amp'd Live as indispensable to people's lives as possible, so instead of thinking: "I can't leave home without my phone", they think: "I can't leave home without my Amp'd phone."

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Lockbox

In turning Amp'd Live from a store into a destination, care must be exercised to ensure that the products and services are designed to fit the needs of the people who will use them. Understanding this need is the first challenge, and developing an elegant solution to addressing it is the second challenge. A great example of a partial solution at Amp'd is Lockbox.

It seems fairly obvious that providing a way to backup mobile phone contacts is a good idea, and one that hasn't really been executed well by most other carriers, especially if you don't have a Smartphone. The Amp'd solution is pretty good—it doesn't require a computer so no matter what happens to your phone you can retrieve your contacts when you get a new phone—wherever you are.

But taking that idea further, when you really look at how people manage their contacts, you find that many people already have contact lists through Outlook, or Yahoo! Mail, or GMail, etc. Being able to synch these databases with the phone's file system as well as the Lockbox server would really be a better solution. Contacts are not DRM-protected; so there should be no reason why they can't go freely between a phone and a computer. Of course, the Lockbox server is still an important component because if you're not at your computer or if something should happen to your computer you still have a backup that you can access whenever you have your phone, or if you get a new phone.

Additionally, users should have access to their contacts from the Amp'd website if they need to get information when they may be away from their phone (traveling abroad is a good example). Amp'd can still provide adequate solutions without some of these details, but providing the entire solution will encourage Amp'd's reputation as a company that strives to deliver the very best experience of any mobile carrier. That reputation will go a long way in enabling Amp'd to attract and retain more customers for whom this type of dedication is rewarding and who are more likely to reward us with their business.

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Customization

Another important element of transforming Amp'd Live is to allow people the opportunity to customize their experience. Doing this gives people a sense of ownership that includes Amp'd Live. Mobile phone users already feel a sense of ownership and attachment to their phones as pieces of hardware which represent their identity, but no such bond exists between their experience with Amp'd Live. Customization can happen in any number of ways, from enabling them to change themes, skins, add favorites, customize the home screen, etc. Other than Apple's iPhone, which is marketed specifically on the merits of its user interface, almost no other phones are marketed or appreciated in this way. Amp'd has a unique user interface which must continue to be the reason people want to use our service, and allowing users to customize this experience is an important element to achieving this goal.

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Social networks represent a gaping hole in the Amp'd Live network as it currently stands. Customers are given access to existing social networks like MySpace, but this access is tempered by a severely compromised experience which requires a lot of effort to engage. There is no connection from Amp'd Live to social networks, so all this great content that we have on our deck is not passed around.

Amp'd needs to really take this problem by the reins and devise ways to tightly integrate easy access to existing social networks while at the same time building a network of our own. People can already share their photos on Flickr or their videos on YouTube, but there's no place to showcase your favorite Amp'd original video content, or show off what ringtones and songs you've downloaded, etc. People want access to MySpace because it's the place where they'll get the most exposure, there's nothing inherent about MySpace that exists without millions of members.

By creating tools for people to connect with others that don't require launching a separate application for IM, web browsing, photo sharing, etc; by incorporating this support as a natural extension of the user interface, we enable our users to express themselves in an entirely new way, and create a bond with the Amp'd brand that will ensure greater loyalty and significantly differentiate us from every other carrier.

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The ideas and analyses set forth in this document indicate that a paradigm shift is necessary to allow Amp'd to evolve into a greater incarnation. We must dedicate ourselves to delivering the best possible product, which might not always be the fastest to market or the cheapest to build.

In the past, Amp'd has relied on time-to-market and bargain pricing to lure subscribers. Our research has shown that the best way to differentiate in this crowded marketplace is by having the very best product, or making the very best product we can. Markets will always exist for bottom-feeders and early-adopters, but we've shown that the former is not profitable and as it stands our offering does not reflect the genuine interests of the latter. If we can realize this shift it will allow us to create the next generation in mobile entertainment, which is the reason we all became Amp'd employees.

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