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Smartphone Wi-Fi Usage on the Rise

By JAMES KENDRICK of

A report from hotspot locator [WeFi](#) will be released this week showing key metrics in mobile data consumption across platforms. Laptops and netbooks go through a lot of data over Wi-Fi hotspots, as you'd expect, but the report suggests smartphone owners are using hotspots instead of 3G in increasing numbers. With the recent surge in WiFi-enabled smartphones, WeFi's report shows an uptick in smartphone data consumption, much of it by users on the Android platform. However, the data is limited by the absence of a major player in the smartphone arena.

[WeFi](#) is a hotspot location service that works on netbook, laptop, Symbian and Android platforms. The company has a web site that helps members find nearby hotspots, complete with maps pinpointing their locations. There are also Symbian and Android apps to work with WeFi on the fly. The company collects anonymous data from devices that connect to a hotspot via the service, along with generic information like how many devices are connected to a particular hotspot. With a population base of over 5 million users, and a database of 60 million hotspots globally, the statistics show big changes in Wi-Fi usage.

Wi-Fi Data Usage by Platform

For instance, 50 percent of all Android devices analyzed consumed more than 500 MB of data per month each through Wi-Fi hotspots, and 20 percent of those Android owners flew through more than 2 GB of data over the month. That's a lot of web usage on phones, [superphones](#) or not.

Where's the iPhone usage in this report? Nowhere, as Apple doesn't like Wi-Fi scanning apps like WeFi. The report details the reason that iPhone data was not included in any of the reported statistics:

Note that this report does not contain information acquired through iPhone devices. WeFi has developed a client application for the iPhone platform as well, however due to the decision made by Apple to ban all Wi-Fi scanning applications in February 2010, this application is not available on the formal iPhone App Store (iTunes). WeFi's application is very popular, however, on the "alternative" iPhone App market, Cydia; but since Cydia users do not necessarily represent the typical iPhone user population, the iPhone data is not covered in this report.

Symbian is still a huge platform globally, and smartphones using it have been around for a good while. The Wi-Fi data usage reflects that popularity, with over 60 percent of Symbian devices using 0 – 500 MB of data monthly. Very few Symbian devices clock in more than 2 GB of monthly data usage, unlike Android users. This fits in with the duration of session information, which shows 70 percent of Symbian owners jump online, get business done and jump off in less than 5 minutes.

Over 80 percent of notebook/netbook owners use more than 2 GB of data per month, a healthy amount of data which indicates hotspot sessions run much longer on computers than on smartphones. The heavy monthly usage (on all platforms) is noteworthy, as it serves as an indicator of how much data can be used routinely on any device. Some carriers offer 3G hotspot capability for smartphones, with Verizon charging a healthy overage fee for consumption over 2 GB in a given month.

The statistics comparing Wi-Fi usage against 3G show that users consuming less than 100 MB monthly are happy with 3G. The higher the data usage, the more likely the consumer turns to Wi-Fi instead of 3G, even on smartphones. This will concern the carriers wanting to convert everyone to 3G. Our [Mobilize event next month](#) will highlight all aspects of the mobile scene; hopefully we'll see what the carriers think about this.

These statistics prove that smartphone owners go online often, and some stay online for longer periods than ever before. The difference in this usage shows Symbian owners go online for short periods, while many Android owners stay online for an hour or longer. The carriers are surely watching the heavier use of Wi-Fi, and likely trying to figure out how to get users back onto the 3G data networks. How about getting rid of the monthly data caps?

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