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Android and Apple win 6.8m phone activations on Christmas Day

'Sofa Sunday' sees record-breaking level of new converts for Google and Apple, followed by many millions of app downloads

Juliette Garsideguardian.co.uk, Wednesday 28 December 2011 18.05 GMT



Figures show the iPhone is holding its own against the Android surge, but for how long? Photograph: Carolyn Jenkins / Alamy/Alamy

Millions switched their attention from the television set to pocket-sized screens over Christmas as Google and Apple saw a record-breaking 6.8m phone activations in a single day, followed by an app downloading frenzy.

In what some commentators are calling "Sofa Sunday", those who were not glued to the Downton Abbey special turned to the internet to stock up newly acquired phones and tablet computers, with mobile data firm Flurry predicting 1bn apps will be downloaded worldwide over the holiday period.

Around 3.7m devices using Google's Android operating software were switched on for the first time on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, Andy Rubin, Google's mobile senior vice-president announced on Wednesday on Twitter. Android had been averaging 700,000 new users a day.

Total activations for Apple and Android devices reached 6.8m on the 25th, up 353% on the daily average of 1.5m, according to Flurry, suggesting the latest iPhone 4S, released in October, more than held its own against less expensive Android handsets made by Samsung and HTC.

"I am expecting to see Apple as number one for this quarter but not next," said mobile analyst Francisco Jeronimo at IDC. "In the longer term, Android will continue to be the number one, with a market share over 50% worldwide."

The number of apps downloaded on both software platforms surged 125% to 242m worldwide on Christmas Day. The total is more than double any other day in the history

of the two operating systems except Christmas Eve, when 150m apps were installed.

Flurry predicts downloads for the holiday period will reach 1bn. Established classics of the gaming world are holding sway on Android, with Grand Theft Auto III and Sega's Sonic the Hedgehog topping the paid-for download chart.

The owners of iPhones are opting for slightly more highbrow entertainment, with Words with Friends, a version of Scrabble from recently floated gaming group Zynga, topping the paid-for download chart. Those wanting to read a bestseller on their iPad sent Apple's iBooks app into 6th position in the free downloads chart.

Services offering free calls and text messages are beginning to reach critical mass, with Facebook Messenger, Skype and WhatsApp featuring among the top 10 free downloads on iTunes and Android.

The mobile spending spree helped traditional retailers. Mobile traffic on Boxing Day accounted for 20% of all visits and 16% of all spending on the websites of 150 leading UK retailers, according to data collected by IBM. While the average amount spent on a basket of goods at these sites rose just 2%, those browsing on their phones rather than from a desktop computer increased their spending by 275% compared with Boxing Day 2010.

The biggest mobile device spenders are Apple customers – nearly 8% of online shopping sessions were completed on an iPhone, around 7.5% from an iPad, and 4% from an Android phone.

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