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The Usability of Things: Windows 11 Doesn't Need Mobile Apps

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There's been a drive in recent years to make every piece of technology do exactly the same thing as every other piece of technology. This maddening trope reached meme status when fridges started adding social media functionality, presumably to call for help should it ever become sentient and start drinking your orange juice. However, until the release of Windows 11, it seemed to have settled into a quiet groove.

According to the Netflix website, it's possible to watch Squid Game on streaming media players, smart TVs, games consoles, set-top boxes, Blu-ray players, tablets and mobile phones, and PCs and laptops. This kind of accessibility is a fine thing yet it completely dilutes the uniqueness (and usefulness) of each particular device. Most people have two or three of these hardware treasures.

Microsoft is now adding functionality for apps to Windows 11 – not the apps that debuted with Windows 8, which were, essentially, just rebranded .exe files, but mobile phone apps designed for Google's Android. As many of us are now working from home on a regular basis, we may never need to pick up a tablet or phone ever again now that we can watch Netflix on our laptops.

Of course, we could already do that with a web browser. In fact, it's been possible to use mobile apps on PCs for quite some time via emulators such as BlueStacks, which are integrated with the official Play Store. This approach is arguably a better one than Microsoft's, as the tech giant will route access through Amazon, which has none of Google's services built in.

The Mobile Ecosystem

Let's take a look at the positives. As mentioned, increased accessibility is never a bad thing as somebody without a phone might have a PlayStation to watch Netflix on (and vice-versa). Also, there are plenty of services out there that tend to favour the mobile ecosystem over a web-based one. One of the more obvious examples of the latter is casual gaming apps but sports betting operators are moving to mobile, too.

Why now? Sports betting and casino apps haven't always been available on Android. However, the sports betting industry has evolved in such a way that a more 'on the go' style of wagering is preferred, especially with developments like live in-play betting and markets that take account of events as they happen.

In their cheat sheet to online wagering, the sports portal WSN notes that mobile apps are rapidly

becoming the most popular way to bet on football and other sports. Some sportsbooks now even offer mobile-exclusive promotions to keep players on a small screen. However, the same source notes that a lack of screen real estate can cause issues if the wider user interface isn't very well designed.

Other perks of the mobile environment include the fact that apps like Photoshop tend to be free or less expensive on mobile, which could provide something of a solution for artists who don't appreciate Adobe's high monthly subscription costs. Games, too, may benefit from the stronger control schemes offered by gamepad, mouse, and keyboard support.

Inevitably, though, mobile apps on desktops seem like another software quirk that nobody really needs. After all, the whole point of mobile technology is that it's portable, lightweight, and can be dropped in and out of. Whether Android's newfound presence on Windows will force developers to take a different approach to mobile development remains to be seen. The old maxim about things changing yet remaining exactly the same seems especially prescient here.

*Photo by **Meruyert Gonullu** from **Pexels***

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