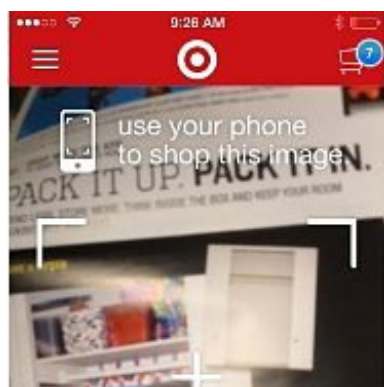


ADVERTISING

How marketers can find opportunities in facial and image recognition

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Target image recognition app

By STAFF REPORTS

Now that CPU and camera technologies have progressed to where consumers can do facial and image recognition right from their mobile devices, this is opening up some new and interesting opportunities for marketers.

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Brands such as Gap and Target are already leveraging image recognition to enhance shopping experiences by tying images to pertinent information. As the technology continues to improve and an individual's digital image and profile starts to play a larger role, there are opportunities for even greater personalization and relevancy, but the potential to creep out consumers also grows.

"First there were bar codes, then QR codes, but neither of those is intuitive," said Nick De Toustain, sales director at [LTU technologies](#). "Taking a picture of something is.

"As humans, we're naturally geared to taking pictures of things we actually see, not codes or tags. Image recognition has become a practical alternative to QR codes. People – not just Williamsburg hipsters – have a growing expectation that they can snap a picture of something of interest and get something cool and useful back."

“Whether image recognition or facial recognition, there are two main considerations: speed and accuracy. Mobile users don’t want to wait more than about 3 seconds for results, and they certainly don’t want the wrong result,” he said.

Implications for marketers

An individual’s digital profile is becoming more and more important as most now have a digital persona of their own and technologies such as facial and image recognition provide ways to classify things that are difficult to classify. Analysts predict a person’s face will very soon be his or her main form of identity and calling card since image recognition technology is able to distinguish a face and attach digital data to it. Mobile devices make the entire process more portable and at the same time more complicated. Mobile allows for more content creation and its portable qualities allows for more content detection. Users are able to leverage their mobile devices to recognize the objects around them while at the same time generating even more content for the already cluttered digital world.

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Google Glass ID app

“Retailers have adopted image recognition technology for their shopping apps – users are able to scan products and receive search results on availability or similar product categories,” said Esha Shah, manager of mobile strategy & innovation at [Fetch](#). “Through image recognition retailers can enable shopping experiences wherever consumers are – not just limiting them.”

With the reflex to “snap a pic, get something useful back” starting to take hold among the general population and not just Gen Y and Z, there are several implications for marketers.

“All of a sudden, marketers will be able to build functionality into their apps allowing their customers to snap a picture of a product and buy it straight from their phone,” Mr. De Toustain said. “From a social media perspective, there are all kinds of metrics marketers can obtain by measuring how often people take pictures of your logo and what the accompanying text says.”

The good news is that it is not difficult to add image recognition capability to an existing mobile app.

“For marketers, this is a way to drive a more personalized message to every consumer,” said Vivek Agrawal, vice president of mobile and emerging technologies at [Skava](#). “Also the canvas for showrooming becomes more than just what’s in the store, it now extends to their digital device.”

“All this can lead to better conversion since the messages can become more relevant and personalized,” he said.

Brands are primarily using image recognition in two ways: facilitating mobile commerce and customer engagement. In the case of mobile commerce, the workflow is: snap a

picture of something desired, the software recognizes the item and a mobile-optimized page is returned where users can buy the item straight from their device. In the case of customer engagement, users are still taking a picture of something, but rather than buying it, the call to action is a promotion like getting a coupon, being entered in a sweepstakes, social media tie-in, etc.

This may help brands serve content in a more personalized and relevant manner.

“For instance with gender and age group you can get a general sense of products to market to them,” Mr. Agrawal said. “With captured image, you can create a strong loyalty engagement for the consumer.”

“The real question is how far you want to go with these tools and not spook the users in the retail world.”

How brands are using it

App’s such as NameTag match strangers to online profiles. When consumers spot someone out and about that they want to identify, they can capture that person’s face using their device’s camera. The app will send the photo wirelessly to NameTag’s server, where it will compare the photo to millions of online records and return with a name, more photos and social media profiles, such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, where the person (or their friends) might have publicly posted photos of themselves.

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NameTag app

Snap Fashion has created an app for Westfield shopping centers that lets shoppers upload a picture and then receive suggestions from the ranges in stock.

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EditMe

And Target is introducing an app that lets users purchase items after scanning magazine ads with their smartphones.

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Target's In-a-Snap

“It’s the latest offering from retailers looking to boost sales with the use of improving image-recognition technology,” Ms. Shah said.

The app, called “In a Snap,” will recognize images for Target’s Room Essentials products in 10 home decor magazines including Architecture and Real Simple. A user can simply scan an image and when it is recognized by the app, the item gets added to a shopping cart for potential purchase.

Companies such as Aurasma provide a service where users can take an image, tag attributes to it and trigger an action based on that image. So for instance, if a retailer

wanted to offer a discount on a particular product, it could take an image and tie a 20 percent off tag to it. If a user captures the same image from his/her mobile device, then it will serve up a 20 percent off code on the device. Brands such as Gap are bringing their point of sale and literature to life using this very technology.

With apps like these questions about privacy and security come into play. “There will always be a dangerous line when it comes to accessing information about people – whether it’s through traditional means like Google search or high-tech means like facial recognition,” Ms. Shah said.

Image recognition technology is playing a huge role in connecting the “real world” to mobile devices. And with the web and social media becoming more visual, there are tremendous opportunities for marketers to mine that massive amount of visual data and generate analytics that aren’t possible using text search alone.

“For retail, there is a lot of infrastructure and foundation work such as better and faster network connections, better web services etc., that needs to happen before this becomes mainstream,” Mr. Agrawal said.

“Early adopters like Gap and Harrods are already trying out augmented reality experiences in their mobile apps.”

“Over the next 2-3 years, this will start becoming table stakes,” he said.

Final Take

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