

COLUMNS

Cracking the mobile utility code: Lessons marketers can learn from my annual holiday

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Vanessa Horwell is chief visibility officer of ThinkInk

By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

By **Vanessa Horwell**

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Every so often, I read an editorial or opinion piece that bemoans mobile technology's takeover of our work-life "balance." The popular belief is that smartphones are turning human beings into workaholics, 24/7 mobile addicts or both.

According to this train of thought, smartphones and tablets now follow us everywhere: from home to work, from work to home, weekday into weekend, day into night, into the bedroom – and yes, into the bathroom with increasingly frequency. It seems as if no one ever stops working or ever fully disconnects from anything or anyone.

But on my recent annual holiday with four "adult" children in tow, I had an epiphany about whether the tether is a help or a hindrance.

Flip on?

Armed with sun crème, flip flops, beach towels and a stack of print magazines for "old-

school” reading, I found myself wonderfully liberated precisely because my smartphone joined me on the two-week trip abroad.

There was a certain beauty in my smartphone’s ability to filter which pieces of life reached me at the beach.

Clients and senior team managers back at the office could contact me at any time, but few actually did. I could review urgent emails if I had to, but my inbox was not brimming with red exclamation points.

In-the-moment mobile connectedness gave me the untethered freedom to be with my family – guilt-free – while still allowing me to plug in and be available, if needed.

Before I left the office, I had personally pondered the mobile utility question: “Am I ready for a mobile-first mentality? Can this mobile device take on all of the activities I need it to handle (essentially, everything) without taking over my life? And will I still feel like I’m on holiday if I have it with me?”

The answer was a resounding yes.

Mind gains

The smartphone did exactly what I needed it to do on holiday: it kept me connected for the tasks, interactions and pieces of information that were important to me.

More importantly, it gave me peace of mind, by giving me the freedom to enjoy much-needed time off with my family.

These connectivity questions create complex challenges for mobile marketers, especially around when, where, how and how often to engage mobile-empowered users. How can marketers create mobile-based experiences that do not make users feel as if their valued devices are being taken over? How can mobile (the channel), mobile (the device) and mobile (the environment) meet consumers’ needs for information, solutions and connectivity without being overwhelming, intrusive or irrelevant?

In her new book “The Mobile Mind Shift: Engineer Your Business to Win in the Mobile Moment,” Forrester Research vice president and principal analyst Julie Ask and co-authors lay out a four-step process by which brands can understand mobile consumers and their needs.

The IDEA process – identify, design, engineer, analyze – can help mobile marketers craft that ephemeral moment focused on mobile utility: the exact time when users rely on their devices to satisfy whatever it is they desire.

And they do have desires.

Six fix

According to ExactTarget’s 2014 Mobile Behavior Report, 89 percent of respondents say smartphones are a central part of everyday life, and 90 percent of users want access to content “however they want it” – meaning information should provide solutions and

answers to their problems as the need arises.

The way I see it, marketers face six common challenges as they craft mobile-specific content and initiatives that can satisfy users' utility-focused needs:

1. The cross-channel mobile experience: Most mobile users want easy navigation and simple solutions.

For cross-channel mobile experiences, pushing the user to a new channel (from the smartphone to a Web site or online promotion, for example) is not "rich" unless the end result delivers a useful solution.

Content needs clear direction, and the use of different channels must support users' engagement by fulfilling the very reason they opened the phone menu in the first place.

2. The mobile payments experience: The emergence of reliable mobile payments turns the phone from a search tool into a digital wallet.

As such, advertisers can use the act of a mobile payment to draw users in, reinforce brand selling points and complete a satisfactory sale.

In return, all stakeholders such as individuals, retailers and brands need to feel that the transaction is worth the investment of time, energy and the sharing of precious information.

3. The mobile advertising experience: More than collateral or cuteness, mobile users need advertising that is useful. They need a specific reason or impetus to interact, engage, purchase or even re-tweet on behalf of or a brand.

Done with utility in mind, the payoffs can be valuable: a May Nielsen report, "The Mobile Tipping Point," notes the continued interest and growth in mobile advertising campaigns and budgets.

Like all campaigns, clear goals and a focus on ROI can help frame the utility question.

4. The mobile marketing experience: The core concepts of mobile marketing are no different than those for any other type of marketing: offer something of value to receive information or earn an appropriate action/interaction.

No more worthless notifications, one-size-fits-all marketing blasts or poorly-timed messages.

Mobile customers think twice before using their smartphones to interact with marketers; make sure the marketing message they encounter is just as thoughtful and utilitarian, not imposing or irrelevant.

5. The mobile email inbox: It is not time to drop the email marketing list into the recycle bin just yet, because the same ExactTarget Mobile Behavior Report notes that 91 percent of consumers use their smartphones daily to check email.

That high rate of activity ups the ante for mobile marketers to develop solutions and

campaigns that respect the value of the email experience.

Support the intersection of mobile and email marketing in ways that solve user's problems and deliver value directly to him or her.

6. Mobile, i.e. global content: Mobile devices connect not only users to the friends, family and workplaces, but they connect the world.

Increasingly, content must be global and relevant to different cultures, traditions and mobile behavior, not to mention aligned by language and time zone.

According to the Cisco Global Mobile Data Forecast Update, mobile traffic worldwide will increase 11-fold by 2018.

Global growth creates new opportunities – and new hurdles and challenges – for mobile marketers who want to find customers wherever they live or where they are, even on holiday.

AS THE UTILITY of mobile devices increases, mobile marketing and marketers must respect the user-focused mentality and experience.

Increasing the budget for mobile marketing is just the first step. Cracking the “utility code” must be a key part of the process, too, one that delivers true utility and value by doing what mobile devices do best: support interactions and activities that can be conducted when users want, on their own time, and without excess or useless information.

Marketing must answer users' questions and provide solutions that improve their mobile-powered communications, commerce, work and leisure activities.

Which raises another utility-focused question: Is it time for the next holiday yet?

Vanessa Horwell is chief visibility officer of [ThinkInk](#), Miami Beach, FL. Reach her at vanessa@thinkinkpr.com.

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