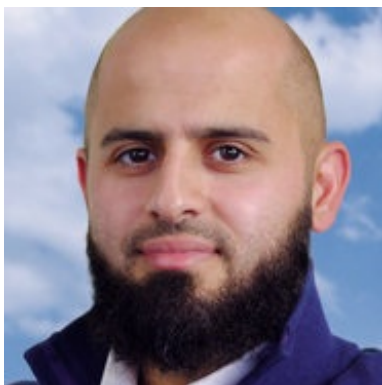COLUMNS

Mobile versus being mobile: Match Web site experience to customer intent

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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The increasing ubiquity of smartphones continues to present opportunities and challenges for all online retailers.

In recent years, we have redesigned how our mobile ecommerce sites are laid out and rendered on smartphones. These revisions have been necessary and important, but I would argue that the underlying assumption so far has been on developing a one-size-fits-all mobile shopping experience.

We need only to consider the very different ways in which individual consumers use their smartphones to realize that applying a single focus design paradigm to improving customers' mobile experiences is at odds with what is happening in the real world.

We all use our smartphones at home, at work, on our commutes and other travels. In fact, the devices are always close at hand 24 hours a day.

By contrast, if we also own a tablet, we typically use that mobile device as a replacement or stand-in for our desktop and laptop computers, so our tablets are not consistently on

our person or in our immediate vicinity.

Mobile experiences: At-rest versus on-the-move

I think we can roughly divide up smartphone commerce usage into two mobile experiences: at-rest mobile and on-the-move mobile.

In the at-rest scenario, an individual is using her smartphone, but she is not in motion. Typically, she is relaxing at home. She might be looking to buy products online, but more often than not she is browsing Web sites to research and compare products and she is not under any kind of purchasing deadline.

In the on-the-move scenario, an individual is using her smartphone while she is in motion. She may be walking, in the car, or on public transport. Her intent to buy tends to be sharper and more focused. She may already be on her way to make a purchase at a bricks-and-mortar store or, since she is in motion, she may be willing to make a quick detour for an opportunistic purchase at a nearby store.

For now, our answer as retailers to the two very different mobile scenarios – at-rest and on-the-move – is one non-specific mobile environment.

I believe we now need to focus on developing the next level of mobile customer engagement, what I like to call intent Web design.

This new approach draws a direct correlation between a customer's purchasing intent, in other words, her readiness to buy your products, with how she is using her smartphone.

Let us compare and contrast the different types of mobile experiences required by an at-rest mobile user versus an on-the-move peer.

There are strong distinctions between the at-rest user with more time at her disposal to educate herself on products and the on-the-move user with limited time and either intent on making a purchase or more likely to be influenced into buying a product (see Table 1).

What we always have to keep in mind is that losing that on-the-move mobile user can happen very quickly if she encounters any kind of obstacle to purchase from a slow-loading Web site to an overly cluttered Web site.

At-rest mobile experience	On-the-move mobile experience
Rich display of primary and secondary purchasing data	Limited display of primary purchasing information
High-resolution, large images	Lower resolution, small images
Lengthy product descriptions	Concise product descriptions
In-depth product reviews and comparisons	Summary charts of product reviews and comparisons
Access to in-store inventory	In-store inventory based on

across multiple stores	nearest store location
Medium-term promotions, i.e., daily or weekly	Short-term promotions, i.e., hourly
Web sites can have more content with some small lag in loading	Web sites must load quickly
Web sites can involve more complicated navigation	Web sites must be simple to navigate

Table 1: At-rest versus on-the-move mobile experience requirements

Determining a smartphone user's intent to purchase

Yet, how do we determine if a mobile user is on the move or at rest?

We may want to engage directly with smartphone users and ask, "Are you on the move right now?" and then present them with special, limited-time offers at stores in their immediate vicinity.

Alternatively, we may wish to take a more indirect approach and simply inquire as to the kind of mobile experience a user thinks she needs, for example, "Do you want to download our native mobile app now?"

We can also mine a variety of technologies to infer information about a smartphone user's intent to purchase including her GPS location, the IP address she is using, how she reached the retailer's ecommerce site and what content she is accessing on that Web site.

We may also look to apply predictive analytics to previous customer data such as Web site visit histories to uncover and identify types of customer behavior signaling intent to purchase.

All ecommerce retailers must start thinking seriously about customer intent to purchase, which should become a key design point for the next mobile experiences we serve up to smartphone users visiting those Web sites.

We must ask ourselves when and how our sites should respond differently to at-rest window shoppers versus on-the-move committed buyers.

We also need to identify which signals in smartphone users' online behavior are the strongest indicators of willingness to buy the retailer's products and then what these retailers can do to amplify those signals and convert them into sales.

Most importantly of all, we must improve the level of engagement with smartphone users so that we can serve them the most personalized, localized and time-sensitive offers based on their intent.

BY BUILDING mobile experiences that can quickly pick up on and are attuned to shifts in customer intent to buy, we can provide significant improvements in usability for customers that, in turn, could translate into increases in customer retention and more

sales of products.

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