

RESEARCH

Why marketers should swap selfies for old-fashioned phone calls: report

November 6, 2015



Brands must realize the power of real-person interaction on mobile

By [Alex Samuely](#)

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Despite the rise of brands on social media, new research from Invoca suggests that consumers are still identifying phone calls as their top smartphone feature, bringing voice-to-voice connections to the forefront of marketers' minds.

Many marketers are missing a key opportunity to engage with customers via more personal means, as evidenced by statistics showing that 66 percent of millennials would rather call a company with an inquiry, as opposed to 22 percent that would instead use social media. More brands should place their store associates or ambassadors in positions that enable them to facilitate more human interactions, instead of relying on commonplace efforts such as pushing out content with selfies and tweets.

"There is a perception that mobile revolves primarily around activities like email, messaging and social especially when it comes to millennials," said Kyle Christensen, vice president of marketing at [Invoca](#), Santa Barbara, CA. "Yes, these are hugely popular, but there is another part of mobile that gets little attention phone calls.

"When it comes down to it, people are still looking to have a conversation, and they value connecting through a live conversation more than any other function on their phone," he said. "This is true for consumers' personal communication with friends and family, as well as interactions with businesses.

"People pick up the phone when it's important when they have complex questions, when they need advice, or when they want to make a major purchase."

Power of meaningful interactions

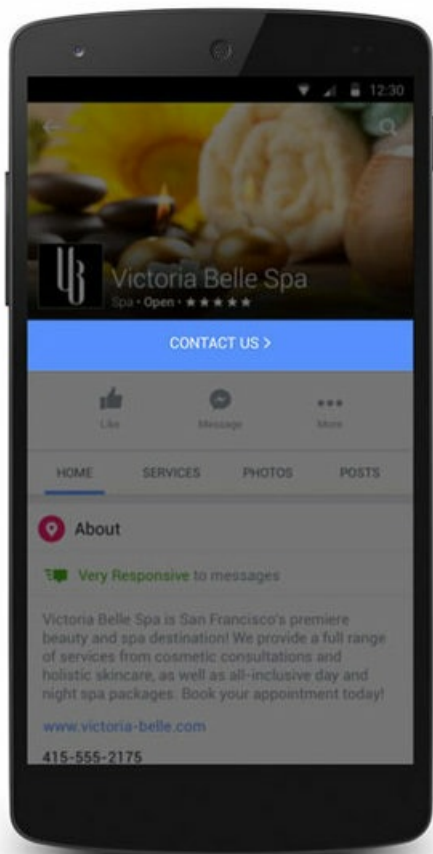
While some brands may be steering heavily toward digital platforms in a bid to connect with more millennials and mobile users, it is imperative for companies to maintain a human presence on the other line as well. According to Invoca's study results, 74 percent of participants admitted they would choose to do business with another brand if they had a negative experience over the phone.

Social media may be a valuable communication tool for some customers, but it should also be complemented with voice-to-voice connections. Smartphone users interact with approximately 27 mobile applications each month, but 38 percent said they would use their device for calling if they were allowed to use their phone to complete one task only.

Google and mobile search are important tools that brands should be leveraging if they want to speak to more users over the phone. The study revealed that 51 percent of respondents claimed they use a search engine to locate a business's phone number, compared to the 25 percent who go directly to the company site.

Therefore, it is imperative for brands to make sure that they do not speak to customers solely through third-parties. Rather, they should have associates manning official social media accounts, as well as telephone lines, to personally respond to customer questions or concerns.

As retail and service sectors grow increasingly more competitive, consumers can easily jump ship to a similar company if they have a negative mobile experience with their initial choice.



The updated Facebook Pages visibly display companies' contact numbers on the homepage

Facebook recently updated its Pages feature to aid businesses in bolstering their mobile presence and sales via more prominent call-to-action buttons, improved layout and new sections for showcasing relevant information to users ([see story](#)). Offering an identifiable phone number on a branded Page could improve conversion even more.

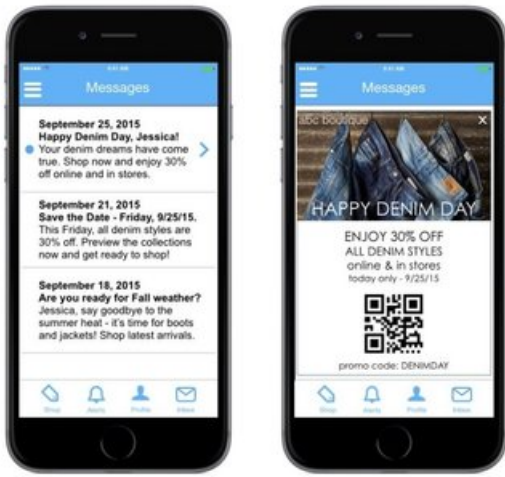
"As marketers evolve their mobile strategy, it's vital to think about how consumers are actually using their phones," Mr. Christensen said. "They're moving quickly from desktop to mobile search and email, using multiple screens and multiple forms of communication, online and off."

Make-or-break communication

Brands' ability to personally respond to customer feedback or questions can make or break sales, as well as cement long-lasting consumer relationships. More than 33 percent of individuals spend one minute or less looking for a company number before moving on, highlighting the necessity of having easily findable contact information on a mobile site or social network.

Messaging is also a valuable channel to tap since it offers prime opportunity for one-to-one marketing. Sixty-seven percent of millennials send messages on their smartphones more than five times a day, while 37 percent do the same with phone calls.

Ultimately, companies must ensure that they are offering the utmost real-life interactions to their customers to foster long-lasting relationships and prevent consumers from flocking to competitors. In some cases, this may be via phone calls, in others, it could be through SMS.



One-to-one messaging is another top marketing strategy for millennials

"We've known for a while that people are increasingly contacting businesses through phone calls driven in large part by the ongoing growth of mobile, and particularly the rise of mobile search," Mr. Christensen said. "We were surprised and interested by how much people, and particularly millennials, prefer phone conversations over other types of interactions with businesses.

"Even a generation known for its reliance on social media is three times more likely to call a business than to tweet at them. This affirms how much people of all ages value conversations."

Final Take

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