COLUMNS

Reviewing SMS and MMS retail holiday marketing

January 25, 2016

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Retailers made great strides, baby steps and big gaffs in the march toward SMS marketing excellence this past holiday season. Here is a recap of ideas to emulate or avoid.

The most common fail was in the post-click experience. Does your message dump the user at your homepage and leave them to find the content promised? This was an early error in email marketing and it is repeated all too often with SMS.

Fine text
The text is an invitation to pursue more content. Make sure the post-click experience delivers a mobile-friendly, crystal clear payoff. Landing pages make this possible do not skimp on this step.

If your SMS message links to a coupon, is it legible to the reader and the sales associate? Coupons should scream, "I am a coupon!" The dotted line, does not really make sense for digital coupons, nevertheless conveys the concept effectively.

Coupons must be able to be saved wherever and however is most convenient for the customer. Provide options to save to wallets or your applications, or allow users to text or email it to themselves. It is all about easy retrieval today or tomorrow, in-store or on the couch.

We have seen that clicks on SMS messages have a long tail SMS links are clicked days, weeks and even months after sending. I assume that this is the result of customers checking their phones when shopping in-store to see if they have a current coupon.

Take advantage of the long tail with an always-current offer on your landing page. Do not send customers to an expired coupon. Replace it with the latest offer. As research from Google revealed, 42 percent of consumers say that they will leave a store if they leave a coupon at home. Make sure your offer is with them at all times.

If your POS system cannot handle mobile coupons, follow the example of Victoria's Secret Pink, which allows customers to redeem offers by showing the text or their app to the sales associate. It makes redemption tracking difficult and requires training, but is an acceptable, customer-friendly stopgap.

JoAnn Stores does a great job with coupons. SMS messages link to a coupon that stands out with a dotted-line treatment and ticking countdown clock. Below the T&Cs are mobile-friendly buttons to download their app, find a store or browse the weekly ad.

Make it click
Since any post-click experience is a landing page, the creative options are endless. Michaels did a match three scratch-off that was irresistible.

Retailers with MMS capabilities have far more creative flexibility and no character limit. Aerie's MMS was a mini-circular with an eye-catching image and callouts for a gift with purchase, gift guide, BOGO, free shipping and holiday store hours.

If you are not MMS-enabled, here is a simple trick to improve legibility white space. Papa Murphy's leaves blank lines between elements, making the message far easier to read than one without the lovely white space. One look and you will wonder why you had not thought of it.

Early in the season retailers teed up their holiday programs. One cross-promoted its app with the promise of "10 sparkly coupons." Another invited subscribers to get the deal of the day with a program specific opt-in. Still another promoted their buy online, pick-up in-store service, which adds to the basket total while providing customer convenience.

No matter the season, follow these best practices for your SMS program:

1. Optimize the post-click experience

2. Make your coupons scream "I am a coupon" with dotted lines

3. Create urgency with a countdown clock

4. Replace expired offers with current offers

5. Provide options to save coupons and offers as many as possible

6. Make your MMS into a mini-circular

7. Use white space for SMS legibility

8. Promote special features and customer benefits

A FINAL GIFT for SMS marketers: Did you know you can turn off sound notifications for specific SMS messages?

If, like me, you sign up for every program imaginable, the notifications can drive you crazy, but you would like to know when you get a personal text. I discovered that the "Details" link in the upper right corner of an iPhone screen allows you to select "Do Not Disturb" for that sender only. If you know how to do this for an Android phone, please share.

Happy New Year.

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