

COLUMNS

How brands should make mobile strategy and platform choices

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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With the rise of the Internet of Things and digital video, 2016 will be a year to remember.

According to Mary Meeker's 2015 Internet Report, the mobile industry has reached an unprecedented inflection point. Mobile Internet usage is now growing faster than general Internet usage worldwide.

While the number of mobile Internet users grew 23 percent over last year, more notable is the shifting behavior of consumers towards mobile channels and how this has contributed to explosive mobile ad growth and increased engagement on social media via mobile.

While 2015 might have been the year of mobile, what is in store for 2016? What will be the most effective strategies and platforms for marketers?

As we look to the year ahead, I predict we will see a dramatic increase in brands leveraging Internet of Things (IoT) platforms and data, native ads, video and other dynamic advertising formats to target audiences, personalize messages and engage their key influencers.

Integral to campaign success is a continued emphasis on creating elegant user experiences that respect consumers' security and privacy, while delivering customized and seamless workflows that help move the needle for brands.

Hype surrounding IoT will finally be justified

Brands currently view IoT as exciting but uncharted marketing territory.

Marketers are still trying to determine the best way to use the vast amount of IoT data available and how to effectively implement a marketing strategy that is guided by that data.

That being said, some brands have been getting IoT right.

In 2015, brands such as Taco Bell and Walgreens relied on consumer location data to garner insights and provide customized content and discounts, effectively using IoT.

In 2016, we will see more brands reach consumers and glean insights through wearables and connected in-home devices as adoption of these devices grows dramatically.

In fact, according to Gartner, consumer adoption of IoT technologies is expected to rise 28 percent. The more consumers embrace IoT and the more marketers accurately apply the data available, the better that branded experiences will become.

Native ads become mainstream and accessible to a variety of brands

Native ads are the perfect example of seamless integration of branded content into an existing paradigm, yet represent an area that marketers have only begun to dabble in.

There is a vast opportunity for brands to immerse content into user experiences.

In 2016 we will see native ads and the definition of native expand to include new applications.

For example, Bing's Native Ads combines intent signals with native experiences, offering an unparalleled experience for search advertisers.

According to Business Insider, native ad revenue is expected to soar in 2016 and beyond. This platform will grow as metrics for success become more clearly refined.

Video will be the new mobile

Just as 2015 witnessed the rise of mobile, 2016 will be the year of video.

Online video ads get three times more clicks, on average, than other digital ad formats, including mobile, display and rich media ads. This trend will continue in 2016.

Video's high performance is driving serious ad dollars. Video is a key service line within agencies and a crucial vehicle to deliver content. It is essentially the summary of all things digital.

Video is a part of the social ecosystem and a powerful storyteller when harnessed correctly. And if video is not included in your overall brand strategy, then you are missing a big opportunity to reach and engage target audiences through immersive content.

Hyperbole notwithstanding, PPC will not die in 2016

Contrary to what some might think, there is absolutely no problem investing in pay-per-click (PPC) since it provides a baseline for driving online traffic.

The impressions alone have value even if people do not click through on advertisements.

However, in 2016, there will be increased pressure to show that PPC leads to actual engagement beyond impressions.

For example, even though someone clicked on the ad and visited your Web site, did the audience do what the advertiser wanted once they landed on your page?

Clicks are no longer enough and next year we will need to see PPC move the needle in terms of actual brand engagement to continue to invest in this strategy.

While PPC will not die in the coming year, it will face increased pressure to lead to actual conversions.

New success metrics will emerge for marketers

Marketers have the ability to track and isolate data in myriad ways, and this ability to get so precise puts pressure on designing just the right success metrics.

The debate around viewability versus engagement will evolve to: "What did you want your audience to do, and did they do it?"

Conversion is no longer just about the number of forms filled or products sold. It is about matching the intended goal with the medium with which audiences are presented.

Awareness is simply not enough anymore. Marketers need to determine if they have moved the needle for their client's business. That is the ultimate success metric.

While the classic marketing funnel is still very much alive, there is now more accountability with contextual data and real-time feedback and data, both of which allow for more effective targeting, ultimately resulting in increased sales.

Social media platforms will evolve from marketing channels to also being customer support channels

As consumers increasingly connect with brands through Facebook and Twitter, these platforms will evolve and also

become channels for technical and customer support.

According to Nielsen, 33 percent of consumers prefer to contact brands through social media rather than other channels, and this number is expected to grow.

Brands will have to learn to balance the use of social media for support and marketing purposes, as both are equally important for addressing customers' concerns as well as driving them through the marketing and sales funnel.

With the rise of innovative marketing techniques, we will see an increased demand for content marketing, marketing automation and nurturing customers for example, engaging customers in the right way.

While many of the marketing initiatives in 2016 are exciting, it is crucial that we consider how they truly move the needle for businesses since that is the ultimate success metric.

This year represents an exciting opportunity for brands to leverage emerging technologies and platforms. Consider Instagram and Snapchat, which are now becoming mainstream advertising options for brands.

TRUE SUCCESS, though, will depend on balancing innovative techniques with data-driven initiatives.

The success of marketing initiatives will ride on whether they help businesses achieve their objectives and whether they are able to embrace these new trends in a way that is beneficial for the consumer and the client.

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