

COLUMNS

Personalizing real-time experiences on mobile

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When I am talking to brands, they always have a clear view of their endgame: increasing mobile engagement and fostering customer loyalty. But where do they start?

Customers now expect brands to deliver contextually relevant and personalized messages in the moment when it is useful to their needs. Yet many companies are not able to deliver these types of customer experiences because they are trying to apply their traditional, batched marketing approach to mobile.

Technology and data need to be leveraged in real-time to deliver superior customer experiences. Every touch point counts.

Just as people can be quick to dismiss impersonal desktop interactions, expectations are higher for a personalized, real-time experience on smartphones. The customer journey is no longer linear. It is a lifecycle.

Fortunately, there are lessons to be learned from those mobile pioneers that came before us.

Stand by me

The getting-to-know-you phase can be awkward in any relationship. But thanks to the rise of mobile interactions, particularly in-application, incredibly sophisticated loyalty programs beyond point systems, and the burgeoning Internet of Things and the data it is creating, brands can now take a more forward-thinking approach to engaging instead of the passive wallflower approach adopted by so many marketers in the past.

Brands are currently streaming in information about their customers as it happens. In the future, this will only further accelerate.

In this way, when brands next engage with their customer, even after a lengthy time apart, they will not fumble to recall their name or the history they share. It will all be right at their fingertips purchases they have made, calls to customer service, when they use the app, how and how often it is all right there.

Better than that, brands will be able to use that uber-knowledge to recommend what they and the customer should do together next.

It is like many relationships you have been waiting to see her and thinking a lot about what she would really, really love. It makes her feel special. Like you are an advocate, not showering her with stuff she does not need or, worse

yet, already has.

Guessing takes time. Getting it wrong takes even more time and money.

Know who you are dealing with, internalize your history together and deliver the most likely next step the first time. That is the straightest, most efficient path to increasing lifetime customer value.

Remember the person in personalization

In the early days of mobile loyalty, knowing someone's name or that they have been a customer before counted as personalization.

From there, personalization became just tailoring messages to their age, gender or location. Now, technology has made it easy to get to know consumers at a much deeper level, where we now have insights into their minute-to-minute location, habits, and favorite products and not just brands. Consumers know it, and expect more.

Rather than targeting masses based on the demographic buckets they fall into, brands need to bring them real-time offers and contextually relevant messages based on the individual's needs and preferences.

Instead of sending diaper coupons to all women ages 20-45, you should see that Sally is in the baby formula aisle and she will probably need a refill on diapers the perfect mobile moment to send a push notification about the new diapers in stock.

No time like the present

As we all embark on the exciting new world of mobile marketing, it is important to remember that people are not static they are mobile and their needs and wants grow and change with time.

If they were in the market for a car last year, they probably are not still looking today. A customer profile should be dynamic, constantly evolving with new information replacing the old.

Not only is it important for brands to evolve how they view a customer over time, but it is also vital that they redefine what "over time" means.

Yes, people will change from year to year, but also consider that if someone was pregnant last month, they may have a child this month.

If they were at an airport yesterday, they hopefully are not still there.

If they just bought groceries, they probably are not going back to the supermarket in the next few minutes.

REACTING IN real time, and understanding that real time means right now not tomorrow, not in an hour will help your brand create better experiences throughout the customer lifecycle and endear them to your brand more. The technology to do this exists. We just need to put it to good use.

With this advice in mind, mobile engagement automation and loyalty can create better relationships and bring brand love to new heights. And with continued success, it can certainly create a lifetime of engagement.

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