

MOBILE

See, hear, touch: Brands capitalize on human senses to drive mobile value

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Slyce powers visual search for retailers

By CHANTAL TODE

A flurry of interactive features on branded digital experiences show how marketers are broadly ramping up mobile-first utility by appealing to the key human senses of touch, hearing and sight.

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Marketers are increasingly embracing Tinder-like swiping, image recognition and voice recognition for a variety of mobile-driven experiences that are easier and more convenient than ever. As opposed to the few standalone examples from previous years, there is a much bigger migration beyond desktop interfaces to embrace mobile-first approaches in 2016.

"All marketers are thinking about how to engage their audiences on mobile - it has become an absolute imperative," said Jeremy Lockhorn, vice president of emerging media at [Razorfish](#). "Smartphones have nearly reached saturation, two-thirds of digital media time is happening on a mobile device, and one in five millennials never uses a desktop computer.

"As people spend more time on the device they also get more comfortable with the unique interface it presents," he said. "Developers likewise have been relying less on interface conventions carried over from the desktop era and more on mobile-first conventions.

"Virtual personal assistants like Cortana and Siri are also getting ever more sophisticated, leading to increased usage."

Unique capabilities

The mobile community has, for years, urged marketers and developers to build digital experiences that take advantage of the unique capabilities of mobile phones. One of the clearest examples of this is the growth in location-based experiences.

However, interfaces taking advantage of a phone's touchscreen and high-quality image and voice recognition capabilities have taken longer to catch on, in part because of how entrenched desktop design has been. This year has seen a significant uptick in the number of these offerings, driven by ever-improving technology as well as consumers' and marketers' growing comfort levels with the many features of a phone.

Following the popularity of dating app Tinder and its use of a swipe right or swipe left motion to quickly browse

through a number of images while indicating approval or disapproval, a number of marketers are embracing a the swiping action.

British retailer Missguided has a new app with a feature titled Swipe to Hype that allows shoppers to scroll through various looks, purchase items of interest and pass on unwanted products ([see story](#)).

Missguided's app

Macy's reportedly has been testing a Tinder-like viewing experiencing on its mobile site since last year but there is no word on when it might scale up the service.

Pizza Hut, Virgin America and Fandango are leveraging Visa Checkout's new spin on mobile payment checkout buttons that allows shoppers to make a purchase by swiping a button to the right to reveal a box to input their password for a faster checkout ([see story](#)).

A nice view

Image recognition has been gaining steam for a couple of years and, in 2016, is reaching new heights.

Retailers such as JCPenney, Best Buy and Neiman Marcus have implemented mobile visual search into their apps, enabling users to take a picture of a desired product and search the brand's inventory for the same or similar piece.

In 2016, the use of visual search is likely to be embraced by new brands while the technology is likely to evolve in several ways this, including integrating with messaging chatbots and mobile concierge platforms ([see story](#)).

Image recognition is also evolving in terms of driving virtual shopping experiences.

Capital One integrates with Amazon's Alexa

Sephora is bringing live 3D facial recognition to the existing Virtual Artist feature on its application and Web site, allowing users to view themselves moving in real time while virtually trying on makeup ([see story](#)).

Listen closely

Voice recognition is quickly gaining steam in 2016.

With the smart home space growing quickly, a significant number of consumers are already using voice commands to control their homes via smartphone apps, according to a recent report from The NPD Group ([see story](#)).

A number of brands are jumping on board with Amazon's smart home assistant Alexa. For example, Capital One lets users make a payment using voice commands.

Santander Bank has a new voice control feature on its app enabling users to discuss their spending ([see story](#)).

For marketers looking to ramp up their mobile-first interactive features, the key is to focus on value.

"Marketers should focus first on finding ways to deliver value to their audiences on mobile," Mr. Lockhorn said.

"The unique interaction paradigms like touch, pinch, swipe, etc are just mechanics that can help deliver that value in an intuitive way.

"Likewise, image recognition and/or voice control are tools that a marketer should consider deploying if they can help their audiences unlock value," he said.

Testing new strategies

Marketers should avoid implementing a technology or interactive engagement mechanic simply because it is possible.

At the same, it is important to test new strategies and understand how the space is evolving.

Also, interactive engagements alone may not be enough to impress today's mobile-savvy consumer. Increasingly, these consumers are also looking for relevant experiences.

"Force-fitting a shiny object into a mobile experience creates confusion and gets in the way more often than it helps," Mr. Lockhorn said.

"That said, new interaction paradigms, engagement models or features sometimes go from novelty to pervasive expectation almost overnight," he said. "It is important to stay on top of evolving mobile interfaces and to experiment with those that are strategically aligned with your value proposition."

"People have extremely high expectations of mobile engagements. They need to be easy-to-use, fast, and increasingly personalized."

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