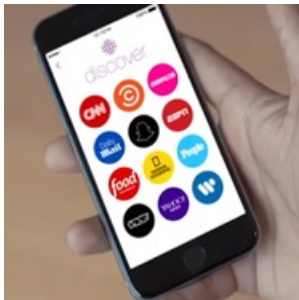


MOBILE

## Will chatbot, Snapchat popularity push branded apps to the wayside?

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*Snapchat's discover*

By [Alex Samuely](#)

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With mobile messaging chatbots and social media marketing opportunities rushing to the forefront of marketers' minds, standalone commerce applications may only prevail for brands with the wherewithal and audience size to maintain ongoing support.

The advent of several new technologies such as chatbots has given marketers a slew of new options to leverage for communicating with consumers and closing the sales loop on mobile. Some brands may choose to tap messaging bots and Snapchat opportunities in favor of rolling out yet another shopping app, while others could opt to focus on their existing apps and ignore the mobile marketing world's newest shiny platforms either strategy of which could work, based on the company's audience size.

"Some marketers probably are less interested in branded apps than in the past, but maybe they are jaded by apps that never should have existed in the first place," said James McNally, senior manager of business development at [Prolific Interactive](#). "Custom, well-produced apps are expensive, both in up-front cost, and in terms of ongoing support.

"Apps still make sense now for brands that they always made sense for," he said. "The reality is that today, it's harder and harder to justify standalone apps that never should have existed in the first place mobile is the dominant paradigm, but the idea that every potato chip brand and soda flavor needs its own app are thankfully over.

"The trend now should be to be savvier about mobile strategy not making an app if it's truly not needed, but making a best-in-class app if mobile is meaningful for the brand."

### New revenue opportunities

Well-known brands with significant followings will likely continue honing their existing or new mobile apps, especially if they offer products for sale.

Established retailers generally have the requisite capital needed to invest in several types of marketing strategies and revenue-making platforms, meaning that introducing new content within Facebook Messenger, Snapchat, Instagram and a mobile app will not break the bank.

A slew of marketers are already tapping into the meteoric rise of chatbot services, enabling consumers to discover

new products, take mobile quizzes and purchase items without leaving the platform.

Sephora's debut on messaging app Kik is one reflection of the push towards conversational commerce through chatbots and how to drive sales with one-to-one experiences on mobile that mimic in-store interactions ([see story](#)).

Meanwhile, Staples, Fandango, 1800Flowers and CNN are among the first brands to reach out directly to Facebook Messenger's large audience as part of a chatbot push announced last week at Facebook's annual F8 developer conference ([see story](#)).

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*Sephora is connecting with millennials on the Kik app*

Having a presence on Facebook Messenger, Kik or any other messaging solution is imperative for marketers seeking to connect with younger consumers. However, testing out chatbots or Snapchat geofilters does not mean that brands should replace their existing app strategies entirely.

"Apps are important," said Shuli Lowy, director of customer success, Americas at [TVTY/The Moment Marketing Company](#). "For some industries, such as banking, daily deal retail and TV streaming, they are a must. But no brand should launch a standalone app simply because it's popular to do so. For an app to have a chance at success, it must provide a substantial value proposition to the end user."

"An increasing amount of opportunities have opened up for brands to interact with consumers through other apps such as Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook Messenger," she said. "These are not alternatives to a standalone app strategy. Each channel functions differently and provides a varied form of engagement with the end user."

For example, Facebook Messenger can now act as a personal concierge for marketers wanting to offer one-to-one responses to their customers. Instagram provides opportunities for attracting new consumers by means of enticing imagery, while Snapchat paves the way for interactive, real-time content.

"Ultimately, there is no single strategy that works for all brands," Ms. Lowy said. "Perhaps the worst strategy is to assume that there is one.

"Marketers need to take the time to understand the lay of the land, participate thoughtfully in authentic experiences, and continuously consider the value they are delivering to each end user."

#### Master of all trades

Cultivating a strong command of each potential mobile revenue stream will help brands maximize their customer engagement strategies. A holistic overview of mobile gives brands the best chance of achieving high ROI.

However, companies with less prevalent followings should still steer clear of developing a mobile app for the sake of having one. Smaller or mid-size brands may be best-suited optimizing their sites for mobile and focusing the rest of their marketing budgets on mastering organic storytelling and product showcasing on messaging bots, Snapchat and Instagram.

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*Even regional brands may want to take customer service to Facebook Messenger*

Therefore, while apps' heyday may not have passed yet, marketers must be cognizant of their companies' audience sizes and facilitate their presence on mobile accordingly.

"The emergence of social as a place where we connect with brands and not just our friends should absolutely impact brands' decisions around whether to create standalone apps," Prolific Interactive's Mr. McNally said.

"However, the question isn't should we make an app or build a chat bot?' but rather, what types of interactions do we want to foster on a mobile device?"

"Once those decisions are made, brands can then decide what specific tactics best support their overall mobile strategy."