

COLUMNS

Mobile deep linking with URL schemes pave way for Apple Universal Links and Google App Indexing implementations

May 24, 2016



Scott Allan is chief marketing officer of Pure Oxygen Labs

By **Scott Allan**

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

As consumer behavior continues to shift to mobile, the Internet Retailer 500 is adapting at a fast clip as budgets move toward the cross-channel customer experience and mobile applications.

Stories abound in the ad-tech press about retailers one-upping each other with new, innovative app features designed to drive engagement with the aim of becoming an app favorite among mobile shoppers.

Many of these new app-only features rely on what is called a URL scheme for external access.

Deep dive

A URL scheme enables the launching of a page or function in a mobile app from a Web browser or another app in the hopes of delighting the shopper.

The use cases for retail apps and URL schemes could be anything from opening the app from mobile search results for store locations to clicking on a banner ad from within another app or clicking on an email link that launches the app.

Getting the user to reengage with the app at every opportunity is important for retailers, especially those that are targeting younger, app-centric demographics.

Frequent app users are valuable because they spend more than the average mobile shopper, according to recent studies by RadiumOne and Criteo.

About a year ago, a review of leading retail apps showed only a handful had deep-linking capabilities with companies such as Amazon leading the way.

Now, **at least 45 leading retailers with apps have one or more URL schemes assigned to their apps for iOS or Android.**

By comparison, the adoption of URL schemes is currently about three times greater than the adoption of iOS Universal Links, which can also enable links to detect and open mobile apps from any marketing channel in addition to indexing the app content for mobile search results.

App-centric universe with deep-linking and URL schemes

Retail apps have matured and marketers are now at a crossroads when it comes to optimizing traffic between Web sites and apps as they strive to capture mobile moments.

Retail apps are also the focal point of ecommerce innovation in a wide range of areas from loyalty to location marketing to the usability of browsing massive product catalogs.

When should marketing links lead to a mobile Web site? When should links detect and open a mobile app, or the app store or even a complementary app?

The answers to these questions could be different based on advertiser, the audience, product or marketing channel.

For marketers grappling with how to take action on insights and consumer behavior trends, the key is to have the ability to test and control the consumer experience when launching the mobile app versus Web site.

URL schemes are providing that test and control mechanism for retailers and marketers as they determine what percentage of their audience can be converted to frequent app user.

The investment in app features and testing of different use cases designed to drive app engagement is producing results.

Yahoo's Flurry reported that session growth for lifestyle and shopping apps grew more than 80 percent from 2014 to 2015.

Apple took notice of the app-centric shopper by creating a shopping category in its app store for the first time in 2015.

URL schemes paving the way to Universal Links and app indexing

Universal Links for iOS and app indexing for Android are developer-focused standards that serve two main purposes: 1) indexing mobile app content so that it will appear in mobile search results and 2) enabling ordinary Web links to detect and launch the app from a browser or another app or marketing channel.

The slow adoption of these standards among retailers shows that most are not ready to invest in this area or prioritize these SDKs and APIs over other projects.

Complex ecommerce operations require that even the smallest change warrants careful ROI risk and reward calculations to avoid an unexpected drop in sales caused by changes in SEO rankings or user experience.

Rather than flip the mobile switch immediately or entirely with universal links and app indexing, URL schemes are being used by marketing departments and technical teams to test and implement specific Web-to-app and app-to-app deep-linking use cases across marketing channels, campaigns and complementary services.

This testing is helping to produce evidence to make the case for bigger investments in strategic deep linking projects.

THE CULTURE of continuous testing and incremental innovation in enterprise ecommerce operations will require that URL schemes, Universal Links and app indexing will all co-exist for the foreseeable future.

All three technical standards will help move mobile commerce forward as deep linking increasingly underpins the mobile experience.

Scott Allan is chief marketing officer of [Pure Oxygen Labs](#), New York. Reach him at scott@pureoxygenlabs.com.