

COLUMNS

## 4 steps to maximize app marketing

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As recently as a decade ago, you would be hard-pressed to hear even the most experienced technophiles using the term "app" in casual conversation. Then came the mobile broadband revolution that turned applications into a vital component of the personal and social fabric of millions of people's lives.

Nielsen estimates that the average person now spends 30 hours per month using apps. This is excellent news for marketers because the app platform provides inherent advantages that can be harnessed to increase customer engagement and ultimately drive return on investment.

But simply copying and pasting an existing Web marketing strategy to an app-driven platform will not be enough. The app environment, after all, is its own unique experience.

A successful app-driven marketing campaign requires a dedicated effort built on the principles of differentiation, exclusivity, content generation, technical savvy and deep engagement.

Use these four strategies to help you optimize your customers' app experience:

1. Emphasize the differences between mobile Web sites and apps. Treating an app as an extension of the traditional mobile Web experience is one of the most common and costly mistakes that a company can make.

Mobile Web sites are great for when a customer needs to quickly check a fact or find contact information, but they are traditionally sources of information, not engagement.

Conversely, there is little need to prominently display basic brand information on your app: The customer has already demonstrated a familiarity with your brand by downloading it.

Instead, focus on creating app-exclusive content that can be viewed even when the customer lacks reliable Internet access.

2. Create content that provides specific and unique value. Customers are more likely to make repeat purchases if your product or service provides them with specific value and they will chose to return to your mobile app for the same reason.

Create special deals available only on your app, or post behind-the-scenes videos that give your most loyal customers a closer look at your company culture.

With the accessibility of information and content reaching an all-time high, consumers are increasingly willing to

connect more deeply with brands they care about, and they are eager to learn as much as they can about the inner workings of companies they value.

3. Take advantage of opt-in marketing. One of the greatest advantages of a mobile app is the power of push notifications.

By downloading your app and activating push notifications, your audience members are explicitly stating that they want your content to pop up during the day.

The average American spends about 162 minutes per day and counting using a mobile device, with much of that time spent in apps.

Use this information to keep track of stages in the customer journey and motivate customers to buy at the appropriate points.

4. Do not neglect the technical details. Apps make for versatile marketing tools, but only if you are willing to devote the appropriate resources to their development.

While it costs time and money to get the app experience right, the results almost always justify the expense.

Do not forget to invest in frequent software updates, which will not only prevent your platform from becoming riddled with bugs, but also offer occasional interface refreshes and new features.

And remember, app-store optimization is just as important as traditional SEO is for your Web site.

WE KNOW THAT the bulk of a user's time on a mobile device is devoted to native apps, but research shows that only a handful of apps receive nearly all the attention.

Consumers easily slip into an app routine, frequently checking what they are accustomed to and ignoring what they are not.

In the end, the goal is to make your app indispensable, ensuring that customers will return day after day to continue their journey with you.

Use the strategies outlined here to curate your app experience for them, and yours will be more than just an icon on customers' screens it will be a part of their daily lives.

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