

COLUMNS

What devices can tell us about consumer intent

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The fact that most of us move from device to device throughout the day is common knowledge.

An eBay Enterprise report found that 81 percent of consumers use more than one device to browse online and that 64 percent rely on more than one device in the evaluation and purchase of a single item. If that sounds impressive, consider that even those numbers will surely grow as mobile continues to expand and new devices hit the market.

It was not so long ago that this proliferation of mobile devices looked like a crisis for digital marketers.

Mobile messaging was widely thought to be ineffective. Even worse, the lack of cookies on mobile left some marketers wondering if programmatic advertising would ever move beyond desktop.

Skip ahead a few short years, and the picture could hardly look more different.

In the United States, mobile now accounts for more than half of digital ad spending.

As ad-tech firms found workarounds for the cookie problem, mobile advertising went from a headache to an enormous opportunity.

Not only could digital advertising automation work on different devices, each device be it a desktop, tablet, phone or even a watch could actually make automation better by supplying a valuable signal about what the user intended to do next.

Different device, different intent

To appreciate how much devices can tell us about user intent, think of someone deciding to buy a car.

A car is a big decision item for a consumer, which often means weeks or months of online research before the consumer travels to the dealership to purchase the vehicle.

For a car brand, knowing that a consumer is at this early stage in the process is crucial information.

Simply put, it means that the brand's messaging can be targeted to move the consumer further along the sales funnel.

And because high-level research is more likely to take place on a desktop than on a mobile device, the hardware itself is providing a valuable clue as to where the consumer is in the process.

Searching for a car on your phone or tablet, in turn, provides a signal that the consumer may be looking for a quick answer or trying to locate dealerships in the vicinity.

The use of mobile, in this case, is telling marketers that the consumer may be very close to making a purchase, and messaging should be adjusted accordingly with discount offers, price comparisons, store locations and click-to-call buttons.

This is not merely a hypothetical example.

A Placed Inc. study found that 63 percent of car shoppers do research on their smartphones while at a dealership. Auto marketers that are not delivering the right message to those consumers are missing an enormous opportunity.

Different devices, one consumer

That marketers can now pick up intent signals based on the device in use is a big step forward for digital marketing.

But even better than simply targeting consumers according to their devices is the power to communicate with one individual consumer as he or she moves from one device to the next, leveraging the digital canvas of connected devices to surround the consumer with effective messaging.

The most sophisticated digital marketing today can do just that.

Taken together, the intent signals from different devices provide a detailed portrait of a consumer's online habits throughout the day.

This full view of the marketing funnel does not mean that marketers should simply bombard consumers with more messages.

On the contrary, it makes it possible to ensure that the consumer is never bombarded with irrelevant or repetitive messages.

WHEN MARKETERS always have a hint as to the consumer's frame of mind based on the device being used, messaging can become far more intimate less like an impersonal blast, and more like a one-on-one conversation.

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