

COLUMNS

Customers are lazy. Are marketers ready to pick up the slack?

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When did it start? Ten, 11 or 12 years ago when marketers began, slowly, conceding their driver's seat to consumers? Suddenly able to participate in online forums, publish their own blogs, post comments and share their opinions for all the Internet to see, consumers took on an entirely new and profoundly influential role as shapers of brand perceptions and marketing messages.

Marketers, in response, had to adjust to new types of interactions and conversations, ones they no longer fully controlled.

What has happened since then seems a bit odd in the broader marketing scheme of things. The Internet, it turns out, has made today's consumers lazy.

That is correct. Lazy.

Loyal to the core

It is not that consumers do not care about brands anymore. They certainly do, perhaps as fiercely and loyally as ever and maybe even more so, given the amount of instantaneous information available at their fingertips.

But in today's mobile-dominant world, consumers do not have to work as hard to find brands, compare products or decide what to buy.

"As a consumer today, I literally do nothing," says Jenny Beightol, director of words and reputations at BellyCard, a digital loyalty and marketing solution for businesses and their customers.

"I can log into my computer or Facebook, and I'm instantly targeted with ads specific to anything I search for, buy, wear, what concert I go to, or where I am," Ms. Beightol said. "Consumers are becoming lazier because there's an expectation that marketers and advertisers will find them."

But how? And where? These are questions that merchants and brands of all sizes often ask, especially if they feel they lack the expertise, time or tools to connect with today's consumers.

Find your customers. (Hint: they are mobile)

In the mobile environment, finding customers is the key to the marketing relationship.

Today's customers have one thing in common that makes them easy to find: they are all fixated on their smartphones.

On those ever-present smartphones and mobile devices, marketers and merchants must make connections that resonate between consumers and brands, products, services and experiences.

Smartphones and tablets are incredibly powerful mobile commerce tools.

IMRG reports that 51 percent of United Kingdom sales in the last three months of 2015 were conducted on smartphones or tablets, while United States mobile commerce, according to Forrester data, is expected to reach \$142 billion this year, with one-third of Web traffic and 11 percent of sales originating from smartphones.

Get busy in the mobile environment

Clearly, merchants need to be smarter about mobile marketing, based on a 2016 BellyCard survey of more than 400 small business owners.

Two-thirds of respondents said they do not segment or send personalized offers to customers based on frequency of visits, and more than 40 percent collect customers' email addresses the good old-fashioned way, through a sign-up sheet or business-card fishbowl.

Half said they do not invest in marketing because they do not have enough knowledge or expertise, while 25 percent said they did not have enough time.

How can marketers leverage the mobile environment and smartphones to capture consumers' attention and make them aware of brands, nearby stores and waiting opportunities?

A few mobile-focused tactics can help, whether the intended consumers are first-time customers, repeat customers or those "just-walking-by-and-thought-I'd-check-you-out" customers who have the potential to fall in love with a brand or experience.

Be human: Everyone talks about personalized marketing today, a concept that is based on the collection, analysis and use of data about customers to send messages, offers and opportunities that are personalized to them.

Personalization involves marketing based on who customers are, where they are, what they like, what they do, and how frequently they do it, among other things.

"Consumers today are smart," Ms. Beightol said. "They'll know if they receive an email or text that is generic sent to every customer in the network. But they'll react positively to a message that says, 'I miss you!' or 'Hey! We haven't seen you in 2 months come back!' because those messages are based on a sense that the marketer or brand knows them and understands them."

Use beacons to connect: "Beacon technology is going to be very powerful, especially for small businesses," Ms. Beightol said.

"As customers walk down the street and pass rows and rows of businesses that have digital marketing programs, they need a reason to engage," she said. "It might be a push notification coming from a store, inviting them in for a cup of coffee, 50 percent off a manicure, or a chance to sample a freshly baked loaf of bread. It's an exciting way to engage with customers, especially if the content resonates with them.

"As long as the messages are personal and sound authentically human not an automated bulk message consumers will pay attention."

Seize the data to seize the opportunity: Mobile data can be turned loose in new and innovative ways.

Dallas, TX-based Fuel Rewards program is piloting a geolocation program this summer that marries data about its loyalty program members' location with data about previous purchases at convenience stores.

The program will send real-time text messages to members' smartphones, inviting them into the convenience store to take advantage of a promotion during those critical two minutes when they are otherwise standing at the pump, fueling up. It is an ideal mash-up of location-based and behavioral data to deliver offers that are truly personal and built for a specific moment a specific opportunity in time.

BOTTOM LINE, mobile marketing requires an understanding of today's customers smart, always-connected consumers who, even though they might not have to work as hard as they once did to interact with a brand, are nonetheless looking for the interactions that make the most sense to them as they navigate their world,

neighborhood and life.

Marketers who understand today's mobile marketing roadmap can reclaim the driver's seat, as well as the business success and deeper loyalty that follows. And satisfied customers confident in the knowledge that whoever is at the wheel understands them can sit back and enjoy the mobile ride with their favorite brands and merchants.

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