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App marketing tips for this holiday season

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By **Matt Lawson**

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The holiday season drives more app downloads in the United States than any other time of year. Matt Lawson, director of performance marketing at Google, delivers key insights into how app marketers can capture the momentum during this crucial time for their businesses.

This holiday season, millions of people will unwrap new mobile devices. They will take selfies on their phones, form-fit them with cool accessories and, of course, download their favorite applications. That is why it is more important than ever for app marketers to ensure that their apps show up when consumers come looking.

In this Q&A, I explain the strategies that should be in every app marketer's holiday playbook.

With millions of apps vying for attention, what are some easy ways to get your app in front of more people this holiday season?

People discover apps in a variety of ways, but nearly half of users find out about apps while browsing on their phone's app store.

To get their attention, I suggest using a unique icon, an attention-grabbing image and a video that showcases the main benefits of your app.

Consider testing different combinations and make the most of these creative assets. You should also make sure your app is discoverable in all the places people are looking.

What questions can guide app marketers' campaign thinking?

A golden rule: use consumer insights.

What are people's needs and interests as they head into the new year? Are they looking for a new fitness app? Are they catching up on shows to binge-watch? Or are there useful apps to help with travel, shopping, and daily errands?

For instance, Jet.com, an online shopping app, knows that people are searching for deals during the holidays especially on Cyber Monday, when mobile conversion rates jump 50 percent compared to Nov. 1.

To entice new buyers to make holiday purchases on mobile, Jet.com is offering unique discounts to customers who

shop in their app. Unique promo codes help shoppers save on everything from snowman cookie cutters to glittering tree ornaments.

What would you say to app marketers hoping to drive maximum value from their campaigns during the holidays? In my role, I get to meet marketers from large and small brands, most of whom are investing in an app in some way.

The forward-thinking ones are beginning to shift their focus from app installs to app usage. They start by understanding what in-app actions drive value for their business, such as adding an item to a cart or getting to the fifth level of a game, and then finding users likely to take those actions.

For example, Stash Invest, an investment advisor with a mobile-first strategy, learned that people who registered for an account in the company's app were valuable to its business. By optimizing for this in-app action, Stash saw a 4.5X lift in account registrations.

Here is another example from the retail world: Fifty-three percent of smartphone shoppers prefer to access account and loyalty information in an app versus a mobile Web site.

If you have developed a retail app, you may determine that someone who creates or updates his or her personal profile is more likely to become a repeat shopper.

Or say you are a financial institution. Consider this: Seventy-three percent of people who use their smartphones to manage finances rely on apps instead of mobile sites. And what they do on each platform is quite different.

According to our research, people tend to use mobile apps to transfer money or check an account's balance.

After the holidays, what is the best way to keep users engaged?

Millions of people will download apps during the holidays, but half of them will eventually abandon an app because it was not as useful as they thought it would be. But consumers are forgiving.

Ninety-one percent of smartphone users who abandoned an app would consider using it again if changes were made.

Start by tracking in-app events to better understand when and where your users drop off and then build a plan to re-engage them.

You might invest in an onboarding experience that highlights app features, or include deep links to your app in social media and marketing emails.

There are also a few re-engagement tactics to win back lapsed users. Enable push notifications to communicate new features or promotions.

According to our research, 85 percent of users find notifications on mobile to be useful.

Any parting advice before the holiday madness hits?

Consumer expectations are higher than ever before.

Consequently, apps need to provide relevant, useful and delightful experiences.

Your marketing should be no different, especially during the ever-critical holiday season.

Start by defining the metrics and user actions that matter to your business. Then, focus on delivering the best message to the right users, efficiently and scalably, so they not only download your app, but come back over and over again throughout the year.

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