Luxury Daily®

The News and Intelligence You Need on Luxury

COLUMNS

Device detection 2.0: Are marketers getting the full picture?

February 16, 2017

James Rosewell is cofounder/CEO of 51 Degrees

By James Rosewell

Too many brands are content to deliver a mediocre Web experience to the detriment of bottomline profit. They fully understand that responsive or adaptive Web design is a necessity, not a nice-to-have. And yet, implementation is typically still rudimentary, with brands still fixated on the importance of screen pixels, driven by an incomplete understanding of the mobile-first mantra popularized by Google.

The media buzz around the iPhone's 10th anniversary this year shows how much of an impact the first blockbuster smartphone had, and how much the market has evolved since it appeared. The original model's 3.5-inch screen size is more than a full inch smaller than today's average in Western Europe.

Changing behavior

Smartphone ownership has increased so much that 71 per cent of United Kingdom adults now own such a device, according to Ofcom's Communications Market Report 2016. This, combined with the rollout of the 4G mobile network, has caused Internet usage via smartphones to sky-rocket.

In fact, Ofcom found that 66 per cent of respondents use their smartphone to access the Internet.

This shift in consumer behavior has meant that brands have had to work harder to understand which devices consumers use to access their Web sites. Such insight has been essential for Web design optimization, as well as their ability to deliver a better customer experience overall.

But this has been far from easy.

There are thousands of different models of smartphones, tablets and laptops on the market all with different sizes, dimensions and capacity.

When we also consider the high usage of lower-specification feature phones in developing markets responsible for 40 percent of all mobile traffic, according to a study conducted by GSMA it becomes clear that brands targeting a global audience need a smarter approach.

Understanding devices and journeys
"Good enough" is no longer good enough.

Yes, screen size remains an important factor for a good user experience, but it is not the only one.

There is a wide range of other distinguishing device features that affect a site's accessibility and profitability. Think about bandwidth limitations, the type of browser and processing power, to name just a few.

Then there is the customer journey once people arrive on the site: where they enter, how content is signposted, and which path they follow on their first and subsequent site visits. This requires access to an unprecedented and ever-expanding amount of data, along with the people skills and systems to simplify it and turn data into actionable insights.

There are further complications still.

On the one hand, brands are rolling out increasingly graphically intense and computationally complex Web site designs.

On the other hand, we have seen a growth in the markets for low-end and mid-range smartphones that use browsers optimized for lower data charges.

Meanwhile, in Western markets, the rise of ad blockers is a further consideration.

To illustrate, consider the following example. A U.K. resident with a smartphone in a 3G network-only area or an African small business owner with a feature phone in Africa will both benefit more from lightweight, optimized mobile pages even if their screen is the same size as the one used by the London-based millennial.

This shows why it is vitally important for brands to understand all the capabilities of the devices their customers use to access the Internet and brand sites.

Improving on the basics
Until now, brands have had to choose between two equally difficult options: either test their Web sites across a wide range of devices, thus increasing operating costs, or take a punt on the quality of consumers' experience. Both, frankly, are completely unacceptable.

It does not need to be this way. Brands should be looking beyond data provided by Google Analytics alone to incorporate useful and actionable insight about physical screen size, granular device segmentation, and other phone features that affect the user experience. A simple list of phone models and browser vendors no longer cuts it.

Device intelligence
Device detection solutions can extract this crucial intelligence. They are particularly useful for identifying users whose devices are not able to satisfactorily render complex Web site graphics, or brand videos such as webinars, tutorials and advertising campaigns.

Research repeatedly shows that users will abandon a purchasing journey, or even switch to a competitor, when they have a poor mobile Web experience.

Serving the right Webpage can make all the difference.

Users who do not face barriers while accessing a Webpage and loading content will spend more time engaging with the brand. It puts the brand in a strong position to turn this first-time visitor into an actual customer and, with the right marketing strategy, a profitable one.

Additionally, brands can derive valuable insights into their customers based on granular device information, which should form part of the single customer view.

These insights can inform brands on the make-up of their customers their demographics, characteristics and behavior to inform product or service development that goes far beyond their website.

GETTING THIS STUFF right really matters.

Siloed thinking when it comes to smart devices is out-dated and will cause many valuable customers to fall by the wayside.

New 5G connectivity is looming on the horizon, and it is more important now than ever that brands consider the full range of devices and technology that their customers are using to make sure they continue to deliver the best

possible experience for all.

James Rosewell is cofounder/CEO of 51 Degrees, London. Reach him at james@51degrees.com.