

COLUMNS

Only one thing matters in mobile Web versus mobile app debate

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The mobile Web versus mobile application debate continues to be one of the biggest and possibly most unnecessary conversations happening among marketers. It is no wonder, as device proliferation continues to grow and mobile activity is surging, with comScore reporting that three out of every four minutes of digital time is spent on mobile devices.

However, marketers are losing sight of the big picture in an effort to keep pace with fast-moving trends in the digital ecosystem.

Consumers do not care or rather they care far less than marketers think about how and where they interact with a brand.

Funnel vision

Sure, all consumers have their personal preferences, but what matters more than anything else is the experience.

People are not going to engage with a brand based on whether or not the marketing team can develop a reliable app with all of the functionality of a desktop site, or a mobile Web experience with responsive design.

The consumer just wants the simplest, fastest and most convenient experience possible.

For mobile marketers, the challenge has always been: can you do as much from a user-interface perspective on a mobile site, as you can with an app?

With an app, you can build rich experiences, but there is more friction with the customer. When driving installs is a top priority, and getting non-loyal customers to download your app, this is a major hurdle.

Consumers are downloading more apps than ever, but the app economy is not the "Field of Dreams" that some marketers think. Just because you built it, does not mean they will come.

Even with a dedicated marketing campaign behind a brand's app, discoverability continues to be a challenge for many apps, the majority of which fail to retain their users after 90 days.

Apps are best for the highly engaged core customer, but if the goal of a marketer or advertiser is to nurture relationships between new and first-time customers, it is time to shift focus and turn attention to the advocacy funnel.

Without awareness, marketers have the challenge of getting brand recognition, which leads to consideration, a trial period ideally followed by one or multiple purchases, which means you have a loyal customer who can be your brand advocate.

Mobile Web is far better suited for this type of advocacy campaign and reaching these early stage or lightly engaged customers when building awareness. You do not offer an engagement ring on a first date, and you do not ask a potential customer for a commitment on the first interaction. And yes, an app is a commitment.

Ultimately, customer choice rules.

Net net

Although apps may be better for marketers as it ensures a more consistent brand experience, no customer will install an app for every retailer or business from whom they buy. Mobile Web can be just fine for the right customer, with the right experience.

While we are seeing a convergence of mobile Web and mobile apps, we must not lose sight of the fact that consumers just want content as fast and easily as possible.

The app economy is maturing and shifting, as we can see with the impending rise of universal links and instant apps.

But if you are a marketer, the takeaway is how do you leverage the app and the Web converging to bring the mobile Web and keep the app economy healthy?

ACCORDING TO Nielsen, 91 percent of adults have a mobile phone at arm's length 24 hours a day.

As a marketer, you have to be responsible about that kind of access, and understand what is best for the customer.

Building a long-lasting relationship with a customer with a high lifetime value is not about what new platforms or channels are available. It is about what's right for customers.

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