

COLUMNS

Why marketing programs should begin with mobile

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While mobile has been held as the promising new medium, it has really been applied somewhat as an adjunct to most brands' main marketing programs.

Over the past couple of years, mobile has proven itself, demonstrating to marketers that it packs a powerful punch.

In 2010, we saw definite movement towards dedicated budgets for mobile advertising and marketing – a significant departure from the year before where marketers were reluctant to do more than dip toes into mobile waters with small discretionary spends.

The result was mobile advertising and marketing spend more than doubling and nearing the \$1 billion mark in the United States alone, according to multiple sources.

Each time that mobile was tried for marketing programs, it proved itself with better results than traditional online in terms of target response.

Some visionary marketers are beginning to see how mobile can turn established marketing practices on their head and become the lead into marketing programs instead of the add-on.

Why and how can mobile become the foundation on which most, if not all, high-impact marketing programs are built?

Tower power

To start, there is unprecedented speed and adoption of mobile globally.

With the GSMA's projections of nearly 6 billion mobile subscribers by 2013, we are nearing full global market saturation. Never before has any media had this kind of consumer power.

But the advantages of mobile only start with its unmatched market penetration.

Also unique to mobile is its ability to enable marketers to understand their users in ways never possible before.

Brands can get data-driven metrics on consumer preferences and responses. This is exceedingly valuable information for marketers that should lift mobile's place to the front of most marketing plans.

Beyond the very legitimate value of mobile as another important medium, mobile provides value as a guide to all other advertising and marketing media.

Mobile can guide marketers on targeting, as well as message, creative testing and offer testing.

Marketers can use mobile analytics and campaign performance metrics to help them with both targeting, messaging and offers. What works with whom? This important information can become the foundation of planning for all other medium as well.

Consider a scenario in which, as a result of well-executed mobile opt-in campaigns, a brand's mobile community is created.

Over time, through ongoing dialogue with the community, the brand begins to build profiles for its community and its members.

Through segmentation and analytics tools, the brand is able to recognize community members' preferences with offers, mobile and other channels, even messages, down to time-of-day preferences.

These communities are not restricted to mobile.

Because of the higher likelihood of consumers responding to mobile, it becomes the basis for preference and history profiles on consumers.

Add to it mobile's unique ability to close the digital-physical divide. Virtually any consumer-directed business can gain from this mobile advantage.

In addition to the obvious potential gains to the top line, mobile in-and-near-physical-location metrics add another powerful profiling dimension.

Profiles and preference intelligence gained through mobile can be put to broader use,

and applied to offers and alerts, even awareness campaigns, to create well-targeted communications through virtually all media.

Personalized content in context

There has been much talk and some real steps towards customized content, based on user preferences on sites – both mobile and Web. And we have already entered a period where the lines between editorial and advertising content continues to blur.

As long as promotional content is based on the principle of utility and value exchange with the consumers, the blurring of lines should pose no issue.

Amazon, Apple and Netflix have for years been using their recommendation engines to provide some degree of personalized offers.

At Mobile World Congress last February, Yahoo debuted Livestand, intended to provide personalized contextual content – both editorial and promotional, and tie together Yahoo's Web and mobile properties.

Additionally Yahoo is building an ecosystem with its content and advertiser partners with the aim to provide personalized content in context.

The idea of ecosystems built around the person is an interesting one. Mobile will be key to it, as the primary provider of the context – affinity and proximity amongst others.

While custom television may be several years away, over-the-top online TV is already providing the path to custom TV.

Even with network TV, custom content and offers through mobile become ways to complement and augment broadcasts and further engage consumers.

Add to the mix the projected growth of tablets and the growing reality of three screens working in concert with each other and around the individual consumer, and we get even closer to customized communications across all media, with mobile as the linchpin.

So while TV still rules when it comes to ad spend, with the combination of mobile media, we can even pump up the potency of TV. And by doing so, we improve the experience for the consumer.

We have still got work to do to create personalized contextual media across all fronts. But we are definitely beginning that journey, with mobile fueling the drive.

So, for now, move mobile from the back of the line when it comes to marketing planning and budgets, and start with mobile.

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