

COLUMNS

Focus on the “why” of mobile commerce

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By [Thad Peterson](#)

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As mobile commerce emerges as a force in retail, it is natural to focus on the “what and which” around the ideas:

- What platform will win?
- Which wallet model should we look at?
- Which approach to mobile payments will ultimately succeed?
- What kind of security mechanisms will be required?

The list goes on, and these are important things to think about, but by focusing on the “what/which” we may not be paying enough attention to the “why.”

Gen Why

By focusing on the “what/which” thing, we may be missing the really big idea around mobile commerce: it creates the ability to personally engage consumers wherever they may be, and that is something that we have never before been able to do.

This is the idea that we see at its worst in the film, “Minority Report,” with electronic billboards touting targeted merchandise such as rude avatars in a high-tech souk.

But at its best, the idea can create an environment where individual needs are combined with offers that address those needs and delivered at the place and time of the consumer's choosing – ubiquitous, relevant, individualized marketing.

The vision of ubiquitous computing was presciently conceived by Xerox PARC and Mark Weiser in 1991, and these are the same guys who invented the computer mouse and a lot of other very cool stuff way ahead of anyone else.

The source for their amazing creativity in technology was that they were “trying to conceive a new way of thinking about computers, one that takes into account the human world and allows the computers themselves to vanish into the background” (Scientific American, September 1991).

When mobile commerce is combined with traditional marketing channels and also delivered in store and at point of sale, we can make the Xerox PARC vision come true – to make the technology vanish into the background, leaving only the ability to deliver relevant and actionable information to consumers when and where they need it.

One-off, device-based programs – applications, anyone? – as well as traditional loyalty efforts, shotgun promotions that are either online or in newspaper inserts, and generic, one-size-fits-all messaging are all symptoms of a disintegrated solution.

We see the results every day in massively inefficient promotional budgets and expensive loyalty programs that do not incent customers to positively change their behavior.

PS on POS

To make the consumer really value her relationship with a retailer and, by doing so, increase her value to the retailer, every aspect of their interaction needs to be included in the solution.

Mobile commerce in combination with delivery at POS and through traditional means becomes the vehicle that allows a revolution in marketing at retail.

Finally, for real, we can create an environment where a customer can say, “The store knows who I am, and can help me do what I need to do and do it better no matter where I'm dealing with the store.” This is a breakthrough in customer engagement and marketing.

The coolest thing about this idea is that it basically takes marketing back to the day of the general store, where the shopkeeper knew all of her customers by name and could deliver exactly what they needed.

Now we can deliver that same experience to thousands of different customers wherever that customer touches the store. And that is a very big deal.

Let us not get so hung up on the “what/which” thing that we miss the incredible opportunity of the “why” thing that is now within our reach. It will change the world of retail.

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