COLUMNS

The correct relationship between apps, mobile Web sites and Web sites

July 21, 2011

By Alan S. Knitowski

Fifteen years ago, most companies did not have either an Internet Web site or an online presence.

When they did, what existed was pretty basic and still had yet to be refined to a point of what we would likely consider either "normal" or "table stakes" today.

In 2011, we have both the quality and capabilities of corporate Web sites, including the breadth, depth and reach of the associated and underlying digital offerings accompanying them.

Unfortunately, the same mindset that permeated the transition from "no Internet Web site" to "Internet Web site" resembles the current transition from "no mobile Web site" to "mobile Web site" and the transition from "no mobile app" to "mobile app".

Set with reset

However unfortunate, the trend makes sense, despite frustration accompanying just how wrong this approach is.

After all, going from "nothing" to "something" tends to follow an age-old pattern of

common human behavior.

Namely, the inherent serial approach of intellectual processing based on the adage of "how do I take something that I did before in the old physical world and then extend it to the new digital world now"?

Or, thereafter, "now that I've taken what I've done in the physical world to the digital world, how do I then take what I did in the digital world to the mobile world?"

The answer may surprise you, and it is something very critical to the success of your digital media strategy, whether you are a large or small company, publicly or privately held.

To get going, forget everything, hit your reset button and turn your current thinking on its head.

Going mobile and engaging your audience anywhere and anytime is not about extending an Internet Web site to a mobile Web site and onward to a mobile app. It is actually the exact reverse of this theory.

Kids today

Confused? Well, how many of us happen to have seen a child walk up to either a television or a laptop and "swipe" the screen in an attempt to advance the content on the device?

Or, how many of us have seen a child walk up to the same devices and attempt to "launch" a photo, video or audio file by "tapping" the screen?

If you have not seen this behavior, then let me explain why these actions are absolutely essential in understanding and being successful as the wave of the mobile Internet permeates every part of our society globally.

We currently have high resolution touch screens that allow us to "pinch zoom," "swipe" and "slide" content at will and we have all been empowered to launch features, functionality and content on these mobile experiences anywhere and anytime.

Kids interact with TVs and laptops completely different than we typically do, because they do not know any better and it is now considered "normal" to them.

This new generation of younger users, alongside the rest of us embracing the new smartphone and tablet technology in parallel, is quickly forcing businesses to reassess all of their strategies and tactics regarding digital media and consumer touch points.

Face tomorrow

However, these efforts are often lacking in the basic understanding that the mobile app should be dictating what is needed for the mobile Web site, rather than the Internet Web site dictating what is needed for the mobile Web site.

By default, this implies the mobile Web site should be dictating what the Internet Web site

should be rather than the other way around.

The most engaging and relevant touch points are those made anywhere and anytime at a user's individual selection.

On mobile, many of these decisions become even more personal since a branded icon on a mobile screen is an extremely important digital piece of emotional real estate.

Each of us decides what we want individually. Brands that fail to understand this ultimately risk deletion from the mobile life of its consumers.

So what should a company do to confront this challenge and not get deleted?

Embrace these changes, honor them and commit to these changes everywhere. Revisit previously defined plans, reassess goals, redefine objectives and understand the mobile experience should shape the overall digital strategy.

Do not extend a brand on mobile via a mobile app. Rather, defend a brand on mobile via a mobile app as the core digital anchor and most highly valued touch point with consumers. Let the mobile app lead and the Web sites follow.

Ultimately, if the focus of strategic and tactical efforts is on the coveted position in front of mobile consumers, then it will evolve and enhance a brand's mobile Web site and Internet Web site to support the core digital anchor: the mobile app.

Alan Knitowski is chairman/CEO of Phunware Inc., Austin, TX. Reach him at aknitowski@phunware.com.