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Is it time for an mcommerce holiday?

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Empty stores in December, a popular hallmark of apocalyptic doom, might mean something a little different this holiday season.

This year, shoppers have selected their smartphones as their bargain-hunting weapons of choice, rather than wandering their local neighborhoods to find the perfect deal.

Mobile stole the show on Thanksgiving Day and sales are expected to continue to climb to $34.63 billion this year. This rapid rise in mobile is only expected to continue.

Take a break
In 2016, a Federal Court ruled that high-speed Internet service can be defined as a utility, such as water and electricity, rendering mobile even more relevant and accessible.

As a result, mobile commerce has become ubiquitous, and is capturing an ever-increasing share of the post-holiday pie.

With such momentum and buzz, one might expect retailers would be celebrating. Enjoying a holiday, even. But so far, it seems they have yet to take notice.

Other artificially created retail holidays, such as Black Friday, Cyber Money, Prime Day (or week) and Singles Day, have all been financial boons to the industry, and commercial promotion creeps up earlier every year.

For example, in many stores, holiday deal advertising can begin as early as late August, across a variety of digital and in-person platforms. But despite the enormous opportunity that mcommerce represents, retailers have yet to capitalize on the chance to establish a retail holiday for mobile shoppers.

Part of the problem is the quality of reporting data about when and how marketers should go about creating such a holiday for maximum success.

Bricks-and-mortar stores have the advantage of being able to physically see their customers, monitor traffic patterns, and keep a sharp eye out for brand loyalists or those who wander in carrying competitors' shopping bags.

Thousands of tech companies have cut their teeth on providing similar services objectively tracking customers' digital and PC shopping footprint.

Data on mobile shoppers' habits, however, is predominantly biased or self-reported from surveys.

With such low-quality data, it is difficult for retailers to identify and agree on the calendar date best-suited for mobile shoppers.

Shift key
Another problem with picking a date comes down to shifting habits.

Studies have indicated that traditional seasonal shopping is a thing of the past: 42 percent of holiday shopping is completed before Black Friday, yet 40 percent of shoppers also continue holiday shopping after Christmas.

With such a broad timescale and poor input data, isolating the best time to launch an mcommerce holiday becomes to put it politely unwieldy at best.

Fortunately for retailers, there are ways to create context in the chaos.

New analytics tools are opening up the shuttered doors of mobile data, making it more accessible for marketers.

Advances in purpose-built artificial intelligence and machine learning have enabled marketers to take a comprehensive, 360-degree view of both application and mobile Web behavior.

Now, businesses can not only know who their customers are, but also when and how they like to shop, what process leads to a purchase, and what other businesses and apps they frequent.

Unlike biased or self-reported data, consented mobile data where consumers agree to release their data for a more personalized experience is computer-generated information based on objective behavioral information drawn in real-time.

More accurate information helps marketers create more relevant, timely and targeted campaigns and consumer outreach programs. This ensures that they are able to reach their target markets at the best possible time, improve shoppers' experiences and increase revenue.

SO WHEN WILL we be anxiously refreshing our screens for mcommerce Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday, celebrating the pinnacle of the capitalist dream? That remains to be seen.

For now, it is time for serious marketers, retailers and platforms to take a hard look at their mobile traffic data.

This growing demographic of shoppers is too meaningful to approach with sloppy, incomplete information, and those businesses that are able to leverage their data effectively stand to make significant gains in market share.

The future of retail shopping is already written on the wall. Now it is time for businesses to read it. On their smartphones, of course.

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