COLUMNS

Tips for retailers to capture mobile sales this holiday season

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By Bill Goldbach

The online holiday shopping season is in high-gear and with sales of smartphones and tablets outpacing PCs, this year is poised to be the most popular year yet for mobile commerce transactions.

However, retailers will miss out on sales if the mobile shopping experience is too cumbersome for users or if it is perceived as not being secure.

A recent poll conducted by Harris Interactive showed that 84 percent of respondents have struggled with mobile transactions, 43 percent said a negative experience would cause them to abandon the mobile commerce transaction and 16 percent said it would cause them to be more likely to buy from a competitor.

So what can retailers do to improve the user experience and increase security and capture more mobile sales this holiday season? Below are five tips:

Ditch the clunky password: Typing long passwords on tiny smartphone keypads to log into online accounts or approve transactions is too burdensome for mobile shoppers.

In fact, in a recent survey 60 percent of smartphone owners said they wish there were an easier way to authenticate for mobile applications and mobile Web sites.

Streamline the user authentication process by using new techniques that are designed for touch screens, such as an image-based approach that creates one-time passwords simply by having users tap on a few pictures.

A faster and easier authentication process allows shoppers to log into their online accounts or approve purchases on the go, and the use of one-time passwords improves security and protects your customers from fraud.

Do not put your shoppers through an eye exam: Many Web sites still use those warped and distorted word tests called CAPTCHA to stop spam and bots on their sites.

As hard as they are on a traditional PC, they are nearly impossible to solve on a smartphone.

If you have to use a CAPTCHA to keep away the bots, at least use one that relies on pictures rather than forcing shoppers to decipher garbled text.

Image-based approaches to CAPTCHA are easier to use on mobile devices, and can even be used as an advertising channel.

Design for single-handed use, on the go: Mobile shoppers want to be able to operate the device and navigate their way through your site while holding their smartphone in a single hand, possibly while walking or doing another task at the same time. Design your Web site with this in mind.

This means that you should have minimal content on a page, use a single column layout and break Web pages into smaller portions to limit the need for zooming, panning or scrolling.

Functionality is more important than fancy design when it comes to mobile, so do not use Flash videos or other techniques that may not display properly or slow down page loading time.

Take advantage of built-in functionality to provide your shoppers with shortcuts such as click to call or pull up directions to the nearest store with a single click, using the built-in GPS and location awareness.

Limit the need for text entry: Filling out long forms or doing a lot of typing is a pain for shoppers even on a PC, but it is especially difficult for mobile users who are trying to type using soft keypads.

Limit the need for text entry by using digital fingerprinting and cookies to recognize and remember the user's mobile device so that certain fields can be auto-populated to streamline the checkout process.

Phishing: Do not provide the bait: Studies have shown that people are more likely to click on malicious links and fall victim to phishing attacks on smartphones than on traditional PCs.

It is even more critical on your mobile site than on your traditional Web site to provide

users with visual cues so they know they are on the legitimate Web site and not a phishing site.

Make sure to get SSL security certificates for your mobile site so you show HTTPS rather than HTTP and your site's URL is displayed with a green address bar.

Security indicators like these provide mobile shoppers with the confidence that the site is secure so they do not hesitate to make a purchase or abandon the mobile site out of security concerns.

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