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## Retailers heading where audience is: eTail West panel

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Executives from the mobile commerce industry took the stage at eTailWest during a March 1 panel presentation titled, "A 360-degree comprehensive plan to increase sales from your mobile strategy" in Palm Springs, CA.

The panelists discussed the differences in their mobile strategies, and dove into key themes that focused on developing a valuable mobile experience, using social media to gain insights and improve the customer experience, and making mobile a core strategy throughout the organization.

"Retailers need to be where their audience is, and that's overwhelmingly the case when we look at where mobile devices are headed," said Joaquin Ruiz, CEO of Catalog Spree. "Whether it be via smartphone or tablet, consumers expect and demand a seamless retail experience that they can take with them, wherever that may be."

Will it fly?

With Amazon now shipping twice the amount of Kindle books as physical books, it shouldn't come as a surprise to retailers that consumer use of mobile devices will quickly replace traditional methods of discovery, consumption and purchase of products and services.

Jonathan Stephan, head of mobile strategy at JetBlue Airways, explained how the airline is actually seeing more bookings from customers since it started to provide more services through mobile channels.

"It's a necessity," Mr. Stephan told a room of about 300 executives. "With mobile devices and tablets, we can touch consumers all the way through to their destination.

"We continually ask ourselves: Are we solving our customers' needs through this channel and using it effectively to increase their loyalty to our brand?" he said.

When working with his colleagues, Mr. Stephan took the approach of making the JetBlue site easily accessible from tablets, given that tablets tend to outrank smartphones when consumers conduct research and book flights using mobile devices.

Social emerged as a central topic on the panel, generating commentary on the importance of integrating social media as a prospecting tool via mobile.

The panelists discussed how social can be used within their mobile strategies to gather insightful data about consumer preferences, wants and needs, ultimately useful for building stronger brand loyalty.

"Providing new value and services via mobile is an important piece of our strategy," said Todd Cabell, director of ecommerce at Crutchfield. "When you better understand how people are interacting with you through mobile channels, you can build on this and improve their experiences."

But not all retailers are on board yet.

Channel vision

"Overall, there's a lot of movement toward mcommerce, but we're still seeing a division," said Mickey Alam Khan, editor in chief of Mobile Marketer and Mobile Commerce Daily.

"Some retailers are definitely putting resources behind mobile and going beyond the simple act of building a mobile Website or app," he said.

"You see the big getting bigger – much bigger, as evidenced by a retailer like eBay, which has 13 unique mobile apps."

When the audience was asked by panel moderator and SiteMinis CEO Marci Troutman as to how many had a mobile strategy in place, only 50 percent indicated that they did.

Mr. AlamKhan said that the most important thing at this point for retailers of any size is to start experimenting: launch a mobile site and start moving forward.

Undoubtedly, many retailers are still asking themselves what is the best way to go in terms of a mobile strategy to realize the most effective ROI.

"Internally, it's easy to sell at this stage of the game because mobile just continues to grow," said Jason Miller, vice president of technology for Motorcycle Superstore.

"Look how large the channel is getting," he said. "Therefore, the question we're asking

ourselves is, what platforms are we going to optimize against?"

Every tactic that marketers and retailers have attempted online is now being deployed on mobile, Mr. Alam Khan said.

"But in terms of ROI, remember that the goal is not just sales on mobile devices," he said. "The goal is to get more foot traffic in your doors and more eyes on your brand.

"Don't just think of mobile as how many sales can I generate from mobile, but how much influence does mobile have in driving traffic to other channels."

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