

COLUMNS

Eliminating the speed delays with mobile Web shopping

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There is more evidence that strongly suggests that mobile customers are favoring browser-based shopping over applications. Research on this topic has been building to that conclusion for several years, although it has been widely ignored by most large Internet retailers.

Gomez research in 2010 pointed to the likely reason for shoppers' mobile Web preference thus: "When you are doing business on the Web, every second counts."

The Compuware-owned firm's study demonstrated that 58 percent of people expect a mobile Web site to perform like a desktop Web site. If a page load takes more than two seconds, 40 percent are likely to abandon that site. And, finally, "the average impact of a one-second delay meant a 7 percent reduction in conversions. For the \$100,000 per day ecommerce site, a one-second delay means \$2.5 million in lost revenues in a year."

Hot-button issue

The unique problem for mobile Web shopping is that the steps to purchasing simply take too long, far longer than on the familiar Web. And that is because of how mobile devices work.

Just clicking a button to “add,” “delete” or “change quantity” on the mobile Web requires sending transaction data from the shopper’s mobile device to the vendor’s server – average three to five seconds – via cell towers, not high-speed cables. These interim steps, long before checking out, are the challenge—it is all about time.

As *Mobile Marketer* and *Mobile Commerce Daily* reporter Rimma Kats concluded in an April article, “Mobile users expect to make sacrifices – in content depth and its presentation – in exchange for anyplace, anytime convenience, but the one thing they will not sacrifice is speed.”

So, apart from finding a way to increase the speed of light, the best technical solution for this problem is eliminating the number of times a mobile customer has to wait for a server call when buying something.

While apps looked like a great solution at first, it turns out that they are not – at least not for mobile commerce. The reason is simply that as more people have started using smartphones, and more vendors have put up mobile Web sites, the practical, economic and physical limitations have emerged, and they are significant.

A brief look at history demonstrates how speed drove innovation on the Web to such an extent that patents for speed-enhancing software such as Amazon’s 1-Click payment method were prosecuted to the tune of multiple millions of dollars, even to be lost.

A recent Wall Street Journal article declared that sales at Amazon increase by 1 percent for every 100 milliseconds it shaves off download times.

The challenge for mobile commerce is to build speedy solutions.

If history supports predictions, the principle of Occam’s Razor will prevail: the simplest solution will win. That points to the mobile Web, not to an infinite number of apps.

Seeking buy-in

One way of resolving this problem would be to use an online cart technology that reduces the time it takes to “add,” “delete” or “change quantity” by virtually 100 percent because it eliminates the need for a server call for each of those commands.

A powerful design innovation emerges naturally from that, since “buy” buttons can now be placed virtually anywhere a product is displayed, with no added overhead built in, allowing for the quickest possible sale to be completed with one click and then checking out.

This “instant-add” cart solution requires nothing but familiar HTML and JavaScript. It is an incremental change that can be inserted into virtually any new or existing cart.

And what it means to a customer arriving at your site on the mobile Web is that he or she can see a product, click “add to cart” and have no forced page change or reload or waiting time at all as a result.

That single click produces an immediate confirmation, with no server call, that the item is

“in cart.”

Consequently, a customer can browse any Web site using this solution and click “buy” buttons in succession, without interruption, without ever having to wait for a full or partial page reload, or seeing the page he or she is looking at disappear only to be replaced with a page called “view cart” and having to click “back” or “continue shopping” (another server call).

Finally, the elegance of this solution is that it forms a perfect bridge between desktop and mobile Web. The reason is simply that it works identically on both, via the browser.

Thus, supporting one of the fundamental best design practices – keeping your commercial Web sites as similar in look and feel as possible – this solution gives your customers the same fast, easy, familiar and pleasurable shopping experience through all your Web sites, mobile or not.

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