

COLUMNS

Smart push notifications make for smarter mobile marketing

June 20, 2012



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Luxury Daily

Ignore all that advice about minding your manners. Businesses that avoid getting pushy do so at their own peril. Your best customers are walking around with your branded application on their hips or in their purses and you need to engage with them.

Without surprise, push notifications have emerged as a key channel of conversation between brands and their mobile customers because they can be sent even when the consumer is not engaged with the branded app.

On point

However, even in its infancy, overuse and misuse of push can already be seen. There is a fine line between what is effective engagement and what – for lack of a better term – is “too pushy.”

A poorly executed push notification campaign that provides little value to end-users can prompt users to opt-out of notifications or, worse, uninstall your app. What a lost opportunity.

How should a progressive brand engage their mobile customers to build a healthy, long-term relationship? When, where, with what and how often should messages be sent?

What follows are a few high-level pointers that mobile marketing managers should consider when deciding how to leverage this unprecedented engagement opportunity. They include content selection, targeting, cadence and performance review.

1. Content is king

Treat customer time as the expensive resource that it is. Even if it takes two seconds to read a push notification, each of those seconds is an opportunity remind them why they love your brand, buy your products and services, and downloaded your app in the first place.

Always make sure that your message is worthy of interrupting your audience.

A marginal reduction in the price of a shirt? eh.

Your annual Memorial Day sale with 20 percent markdown? ... Awesome!

Your content choices are important and can be used to benefit your brand, not only your customer.

For example, sell unused inventory at a discount to make room for the new model. Better yet, send a message to customers who were shopping for the item in question over the past two weeks but did not make a purchase.

Make every push notification count by trying to delight your customers.

2. Send rich, branded content

Your message should be on-brand, easy to read and possess a persuasive and compelling call to action. Include your logo and sharp designs so that the user automatically associates your message with your brand.

3. Build deeper conversations through cross-channel interactions

You can make your push campaigns even more effective by using them to drive your customers to Facebook, Twitter, corporate blogs and mobile Web sites.

A link in the push notification can take users to your social networking pages where they can learn more about your company and contribute to the buzz of your enterprise campaign. Some of our best campaigns started with bringing a Facebook page to the attention of loyal brand customers.

Also, give users the ability to share your push notifications with their friends and family, even those who have not downloaded your app.

Incent viral spread. Push something so compelling that people have to share it – people love spreading a thought-provoking article, an emotional picture or a video of a cat playing with a ball of yarn.

Push notifications can and should be used for new customer acquisition.

4. Deploy user preferences

Every app user can have different opinions about what they want to see and when they

want to see it. Insert a preferences page into your app to ask users about the kinds of content they want to receive via notification, i.e. if they want to hear about new products, scarves, pants, checking accounts and sales.

When sending your push notification campaigns, be mindful of these end-user preferences. Accommodate your customer's needs and interests as much as possible to improve message relevancy and campaign performance.

5. Harness all your customer knowledge

Leverage what you know about a single customer or your population across all of your marketing channels. Use the data in your CRM, Web analytics and offer management systems to target your campaigns based on what you already know about your customer.

For example, if you do not typically offer free shipping, group your "heaviest online shoppers" and send them a notification with a limited-time free-shipping offer.

6. Leverage insights from your app

Smartphone and tablet applications can gather meaningful data. App usage history, users' time zones and real-time location can be used to maximize the effectiveness of your push messaging campaigns.

If you are a retailer, you can create triggers that will automatically send a push that drives a customer into your store for a unique brand experience.

Sending messages based on the user's local time ensures that users receive your messages at the right time. You do not want to accidentally wake up a customer at 4 a.m. on a weekday.

7. Respect user privacy

It is crucial to ask permission, not forgiveness. Your plans to message your users should be transparent and your app settings should allow for the user to opt-out of receiving notifications.

If any personally identifiable data is going to be used for targeting or segmentation, this should be communicated to your customer in accordance with your prevailing privacy policies.

8. Build a mobile app retention plan

Many users will forget about the applications on their device after months, weeks or even days of inactivity.

Create an app lifecycle management plan to send inactive users a push notification to re-engage them with your app. Better yet, create a retention plan made up of several notifications you can use to keep users coming back into your app and interacting with your brand.

9. Do not over-message

Too much of anything can have a harmful effect on app engagement. Even if each push

you send is valuable, sending too many notifications will hurt your brand. Your pushes may become expected, ordinary and lose their luster. Use the same common sense you would deploy in email and SMS campaigns.

10. Practice makes perfect

Your first campaign will not be your most successful campaign and you can only expect to get better if you give your brand the opportunity to learn from your experience.

Keep track of each push campaign you send and take advantage of performance analytics to measure conversion and responses. Compare different campaigns to get a feel for what your audience likes and does not like and make improvements to yield higher responses.

Be careful to not focus solely on click and conversion rates after a push campaign. Understand the full story of audience receptivity to your messages by keeping an eye on your opt-out and app uninstall data to make sure that you are not driving customers away.

ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL is not an effective strategy in any marketing channel. An effective push notification strategy should embrace many or all of the pointers above to maximize the likelihood of message relevance and a beneficial value exchange between brand and customer.

Pushes are a powerful arsenal in a digital marketer's toolkit. But like a sharp sword, its effectiveness is dependent on the wielder.

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