

MOBILE

Personalization is core to the future of mobile search

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By LAUREN JOHNSON

As consumers increasingly use their smartphones and tablets as a primary device for searching, a combination of social media and location can be used to influence keywords and ultimately make for a more tailored and personalized mobile search experience.

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Consumers who search on their mobile devices are looking for specific information, which is usually time or location-sensitive. With the high amount of social media activity happening on mobile devices, weaving social recommendations into search results will help marketers make the most of their search campaigns.

“In realistic terms, mobile search will get to a point where it can start to predict what users are looking for based on the time, location, personal preferences and actions being taken by users – for example, if a user has been in a recipe application, and the phone calendar shows that they have a dinner party the next night, it could predict that the user will be looking for a shop to buy the ingredients,” said Eric Mugnier, U.S. senior vice president at **M&C Saatchi Mobile**, New York.

“Social is mobile. With Windows Phone, Android and iOS all being fully integrated with Twitter and Facebook sharing, it is evident how big a part mobile plays within social

media,” he said.

Personalized search

With mobile usage on social networks continuing to rise, social media networks including Facebook and Twitter have hammered down on making their apps and mobile sites a better experience for both consumers and advertisers.

However, monetization is continuously an issue. Given mobile users’ need for instant help and information while on the go, mobile paid search could be particularly effective here.

Last week, Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg spoke at the Techcrunch Disrupt conference and hinted that the company might develop its own search engine. The move would put Facebook into direct competition with Google and Yahoo, but Facebook’s trove of data could potentially give it a leg up.

Using mobile paid search to recommend content from a consumer’s friends and families adds a layer of personalization and relevancy to searching.

Aggregating content from social media networks into mobile searches could also make advertisements seem less annoying to users. In some scenarios, consumers trust their friends and family for advice more than brands, which is one reason why social media has traditionally been difficult for marketers.

One of the search engines that has been most active in social search is Microsoft’s Bing. The company has recently been touting its search engine that integrates with Facebook through its social sidebar feature.

“Our strategy for mobile is the same for PC – to bring in the best of the Web and social together to help people go from searching to doing,” said Melissa Powell, senior public relations manager for **Bing** at Microsoft, Redmond, WA.

“By bringing relevant friends, experts and enthusiasts into search, we think this will help people complete tasks more quickly. That being said, we’ve optimized the layout and placement of the social results on the mobile device for smaller screen sizes and for touch input, so the user experience will be different than what people see on a PC,” she said.

Search on mobile

In addition to social media, the addition of voice could prove to be particularly strong in curating personalized search, according to some experts. Currently, Apple and Google dominate the space.

“The future of mobile search is Siri. It’s not about text keywords, ads and clicks,” said Aaron Goldman, chief marketing officer at **Kenshoo**, San Francisco.

“It’s about voice instructions, answers and actions. To prepare for this outcome, marketers must digitize and organize all their brand assets so that these virtual digital assistants can

incorporate them into the process,” he said.

The launch of Apple’s Siri last year put Apple in competition with Google. Although Siri might be considered a threat to Google in the future, Google still reigns in the space.

Additionally, other technologies such as near-field communications could also be effective at making mobile search more relevant.

For example, consumers with NFC-enabled mobile devices could tap their smartphones together to receive recommended content. However, NFC is not as widespread in the U.S. as it is in places such as Europe and Asia.

Similarly, augmented reality has the opportunity to change the way that consumers search on their mobile devices by adding a new layer of interaction to objects.

Privacy concerns

Although customization does help users search on their device, privacy is an issue.

Additionally, weaving social media into a small screen in a way that is appealing and non-disruptive will be a challenge, per Jordan Schmitt, digital marketing specialist at [iProspect](#), Boston.

“Personalization is tricky because there is not an abundance of personal information that we have access to until privacy regulations are in place to clearly define what is and is not acceptable,” Mr. Schmitt said.

“With these limitations, one of the areas that we do have control over is the message that we are delivering to our consumers,” he said. “We can make educated assumptions about a user’s conversion path across different devices and then tailor our ad copy to fit their needs.”

Beyond the click

Location and context are key in helping consumers receive quick information while on the go. Looking at where a consumer is conducting a search is extremely indicative of how they search, which is often action-driven with time-sensitive information.

In fact, a recent study from BIA/Kelsey predicts that by 2015, mobile will outpace desktop for local searches ([see story](#)).

“My search for coffee on my smartphone at 10 a.m. in a strange city should look quite different from the same search on my desktop at home,” said Rachel Pasqua, vice president of mobile at [iCrossing](#), New York.

“At home, I’m probably looking for information on a new brand whereas on my smartphone and away from my regular location, I’m probably looking to grab a quick cup on my way to a meeting,” she said. “Take it a step further and add presence to the mix. I might express to Google that I’m interested in seeing results that include coupons or offers from coffee shops in my neighborhood, but only in the early mornings since I personally don’t drink coffee in the afternoon.”

In addition to optimizing search results for mobile specifically, marketers need to be thinking about the post-click action, meaning that it is critical for a brand to have an optimized site.

According to Ms. Pasqua, the more useful, engaging and usable content is, the chances are for driving repeat traffic and visibility over time increase. As HTML5 becomes more standardized, personalization is likely to follow.

Nowadays, consumers expect to not only search for their favorite brands on their mobile device, but also view an optimized site. Gone are the days when consumers are OK pinching and zooming in on content.

One way to segment campaigns is to break up keywords by device into smartphone, tablet and desktop to see which terms consumers are searching most frequently.

“Different searchers require different mobile ad messages and landing pages, which can be implemented in separate search campaigns. Campaign separation also enables brands to better allocate budget throughout the day by device,” said Eric Papczun, U.S. president at [Performics](#), Chicago.

Final Take

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