

COLUMNS

Keeping mobile customers in your store this holiday season

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Let us face it: it is no longer a question that consumers will adopt mobile as an interaction and transaction channel.

Over the last year, mobile has proven itself to be a viable medium that will play an increasingly prevalent role this year and in future years. Case in point: mobile retail is poised to set records this upcoming holiday shopping season, with 20 percent of all online sales being conducted through a mobile device.

Mum's the word

Whether it is a tablet, an iPhone or an Android device, consumers will make more purchases than ever before through their mobile devices, certainly helping to proliferate the concept of "couch commerce." It is something we as marketers need to embrace by making it easier and easier for customers to engage brands through mobile devices while they are doing other things – such as watching television.

But the growth of mobile interaction is being driven by much more than just couch commerce – it is about convenience, efficiency and accessibility.

Hey, I am a working mom and I spend a lot of time on the road, so if I am sitting in an

airport lounge and can switch on my iPad and knock several items off of my holiday list, then that is what I am looking for.

And that same need for convenience, efficiency and accessibility does not end when I get home. It also applies to my in-store shopping trips.

But some of the more traditional bricks-and-mortar retailers I talk to are overly wary of mobile and hesitant to bridge ecommerce mobile initiatives with the in-store experience.

Moreover, they are almost defeatist regarding the efforts of their ecommerce pure-play competitors to turn their stores into expensive showrooms. These retailers need to embrace mobile or they will be left behind.

Case in point: currently four in 10 smartphone users search for an item in a store. As a result, marketers need to find a way to coordinate between the in-store and mobile channels to keep customers in the aisle and close the sale.

Fair comparison

First things first – marketers must accept that consumers will be using their mobile devices to price-compare in store.

I am telling you now, resistance is futile – if price is their motivation, they will do it unless you collect their mobile device at the door which, of course, is not an option. Why?

As, I said before, it is about convenience, efficiency, access to more information.

Instead of fighting the trend, retailers should embrace it and turn it in their favor. How?

First try to understand what your customers are looking to achieve when they are in your store and using their device.

Then, make it easy for them to accomplish those things by giving them an application or letting them scan a QR code that drills down to the features they are seeking: more detail about the product, comparisons, reviews and instant purchase.

Retailers who do this will keep their customers in their store and increase the likelihood of purchase.

Also, remember that, at the end of the day, it is important to define your mobile strategy within the context of your broader presence.

It is not enough to think about mobile as merely a “new channel that will drive transactions” – it is critical to think about how mobile can drive synergy with your existing interaction channels.

Make it easy for your customer to access to new information on their mobile device in-store, so invest in a seamless, mobile version of your site.

It is also critical to remember that your customer may be interacting with you via an iPhone app one minute and through your Web site, phone channel or store the next.

Subsequently, your mobile strategy needs to take these elements into consideration as

well as the corresponding technology and technology integration implication.

Ultimately, this means that executing on your mobile strategy requires alignment between marketing and IT.

Combining the consumer and marketing expertise of the chief marketing officer and the technology and implementation expertise of the chief information officer will help to ensure a smooth transition between your mobile medium and other interaction channels.

SO, HERE IS to a great holiday buying season for you and your customers.

If you are already investing in mobile, take a moment to determine whether you are leveraging it to drive the kinds of cross-channel synergy that I have outlined here.

If not, what steps can you take now to do just that?

For those who are not investing in mobile today, step back and reconsider.

Remember, I am probably sitting in an airport lounge somewhere trying to tick a few more items off my holiday shopping list and you can bet I will have my device with me when I am shopping in-store, too.

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