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Reap holiday rewards with these top 3 mobile best-practice tips

December 20, 2012



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Luxury Daily

Mobile technology is proving to be effective in breaking down barriers and bridging shopping channels. With ever more powerful smartphones and tablets, customers now expect a seamless shopping experience at any time.

Because mobile shopping is expected to be especially crucial this holiday shopping season, the need to embrace mobile commerce is unmistakable. Even if you are uncertain about how to create and execute an effective mobile strategy, these three best-practice tips offer a clear starting place building on tried-and-true ecommerce strategies and tactics.

1. Know your audience

Find out what is right for your marketplace, your customers, and your business through these five steps:

- 1) Study Web analytics and pay attention to visits to store locator pages, carts and checkouts, and email usage. Where do your visitors interact with you most?
- 2) Survey your existing customers about their mobile usage and habits via email marketing, social outposts and direct one-to-one communication.

3) Size up your competition by reading app reviews, download numbers, email campaigns and Web sites.

4) Know which platforms your customers use. Smartphones may be prevalent, but continue to offer simple, text-based services for other customers. Also consider how to capture the small, but fast-growing segment of tablet shoppers.

5) Understand that applications are nice but not yet essential. The mobile Web still dominates with 73 percent of shoppers using it for purchases.

2. Offer multiple purchase pathways

Provide a robust mobile shopping experience with a variety of options. The two best ways are by making search prominent and robust, and by creating visual appeal with imagery.

Cater to mobile shoppers researching specific products by offering a prominent, anchored search box along with a full set of sort and filter tools. Functionality should be on a par with your ecommerce site, with a space-saving design that allows shoppers to expand or condense attributes as needed.

Department store chain Nordstrom offers shoppers a robust search toolset that includes the ability to sort by various criteria and extensive filter options. A search for “boots” includes footwear-specific attributes such as wedge heels and comfort shoes.

Provide multiple purchase pathways by creating visual appeal throughout your mobile site. Old Navy does this well on its mobile home and gateway pages, using a design that includes space for product spotlights and discount offers.

3. Bridge touch points

Consider how to better connect your mobile, Web and in-store offerings to cater to mobile shoppers who also interact via other touch points. Enable them to look up store locations and view in-store availability of items. This is especially important during the holiday season when shoppers are hunting for gift items using their mobile devices.

Take full advantage of geo-location. Offer a bevy of geography specific services and make sure your bricks-and-mortar locations show up on searches in Google Maps and Mapquest. Supercharge your store locator to entice visits by listing store hours, upcoming in-store events and turn-by-turn directions. Build store-specific mobile functionality and consider tying in location- or region-specific sales offers.

ESTABLISH AN effective and engaging mobile presence by combining these mobile best-practice strategies with your robust ecommerce site to entice shoppers, build trust, bridge touch points and win sales.

Mobile shopping stats

- 96 percent of smartphone users have researched products on their devices with 37 percent purchasing via computer Web browser and 32 percent in physical stores. (Google)

- Mobile users will make \$10 billion of purchases on their phones in 2012 and will account for 3 percent of all online spending by 2016. (Forrester Research)
- Mobile traffic and sales increased exponentially from 2010 to 2011. On Cyber Monday last year, 10.8 percent of shoppers used mobile devices to visit merchants' Web sites compared to 3.9 percent in 2010—a more than 175 percent increase. (IBM)
- More than one in five U.S. consumers looks up local recommendations and directions on mobile devices. (Pew)

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