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Reaching the fastidious mobile consumer

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Mobile is changing the game for manufacturers and retailers alike. Empowered consumers are reaching to their mobile phones every step of the journey to research products, check for reviews and make purchasing decisions.

Clearly, mobile applications must assist these consumers in the process, adding value to the experience. But marketers should not miss the opportunity to build mobile into a wider strategy, that is cohesive across all channels, to enable meaningful and ongoing customer engagement.

Indeed, mobile is transforming the way consumers discover, research, shop and purchase.

Mobility occurs in continuity with user

According to the “NRF Consumer Holiday Spending Survey,” a report published by the National Retail Federation, the world’s largest retail trade association, more than half (52.9 percent) of those who own smartphones and 64.1 percent of those who own tablets said in advance of the last holiday shopping season that they intended to use their devices

to research and purchase gifts, décor, food items and more.

A raft of research since underlines the pivotal role of mobile in holiday shopping, and in making routine transactions the whole year through.

This also represents a significant shift in where, when and how consumer engagement occurs.

Contrary to the approach that many companies are taking when they opt to simply tack mobile onto their existing channels, mobile is not just an extension to online interaction.

Mobility occurs in continuity with the user as opposed to the session-based interactions characteristic to online technologies.

Put simply, mobile devices are an extension of the consumer.

The mobile phone is always with the consumer, much like a wallet or a handbag. Based on this behavior the mobile phone may replace wallets and purses in the future, though I am not certain when we will see the arrival of a mobile device that can carry spare lipstick and sunglasses, so the handbag is safe for the time being.

As a result, mobile devices serve as the pivot point between online and in store interactions. Whether companies provide a mobile experience for the consumer or not, consumers are creating their own experience.

Shoppers are creating lists online and accessing them while walking the aisles via their mobile device.

Furthermore, the retail storefront has become an access point where the consumer is assembling recipes, putting together outfits and reviewing recommendations via social media.

Mobile changes retail rules

Showrooming, the practice of evaluating items in store and subsequently purchasing online, is shifting to real-time at the expense of the retailer.

Shoppers are comparing products, reading reviews/social media and price shopping with “Over the Top” retailers or directly with manufacturers on their smartphone while they are in the store.

Against this backdrop, research and services paint a dismal picture, documenting that the vast majority of retailers expect to be affected by showrooming and see sales drop as a result.

Mobile is changing the game for manufacturers and retailers alike.

The traditional relationships between these organizations and the agencies that support and connect them are going to be transformed by the mobile consumer.

Ironically, there is an upside, since research shows shoppers who use mobile and online channels to research and make purchases actually tend to spend more than in-store

shoppers. It would seem that more opportunities to shop using more channels increases convenience and encourages consumers to shop more.

Clearly, those organizations that can successfully evolve and create meaningful engagement with the mobile consumer, maintain relevance and keep pace with the ever-changing mobile landscape will outpace their competition over the next five years.

For organizations to effectively engage the consumer via mobile, they first have to understand what experiences will deliver value that is significant enough to justify taking space — and thus capturing mindshare — within the user's mobile universe.

As mentioned earlier, the mobile device is an extension of the user. It contains their personal information and contacts, serves as a line of communication, perceives the world around them and provides instantaneous information access and feedback.

Accordingly, engagement via mobile should be highly personalized and relevant to the user.

Delivering personal value

Broadly focused interactions quickly become background noise and are filtered or completely discarded.

Research from Accenture, a global management consulting, technology services company, confirms that consumers value advertising and offers that are aligned with their personal preferences. Among the findings:

- Three in four online shoppers prefer retailers that use personal information to improve the shopping experience
- Seventy-three percent want "relevant" ads on their mobile device
- Sixty-five percent like to receive offers to their smartphone based on past purchases while in-store

Consumer engagement begins with creating a delightful and simple way to connect with the consumer that is aligned with your brand and understands how consumers perceive the relationship.

Important questions to ask are: Is the consumer savvy enough to take advantage of a QR scan to reach your mobile presence, or does she need a more step-wise approach? How often does the consumer interact with your brand and products?

Not every retailer should be the main attractions in the shopping mall, nor should they behave like this when they approach mobile.

Ecosystems – that is, the shopping mall concept – will be just as applicable via the mobile device.

These ecosystems will present game-changing opportunities for the small retailer, allowing them to create alliances with manufacturers where there is the opportunity to

have those close relationships.

Ecosystem opportunities will arise not only from the traditional bricks-and-mortar organizations that support shopping malls today, but will arise from banking, telecommunications, communities such as chambers of commerce, social networking and alliances.

Much of this is being driven by the current race to own the mobile wallet, but that is a topic well beyond the scope of this article.

The key here is to understand your consumers and how they view their relationship with your business, and how they interact physically and digitally with you today based on their requirements.

You also need to ask yourself: How do you take that information and, based on it, provide your customers services and interactions that are the most intuitive and comfortable fit with their mobile universe?

However, finding the best way to connecting with the consumer is just the beginning. You must also find a way to deliver value on a personal level to them as an individual.

Interestingly, providing value does not just mean offering consumers a discount or giving something away for free.

Research shows that consumers genuinely appreciate a mobile shopping experience that gives them convenience ease of use and confidence that the transaction is secure.

Based on these insights I have identified five critical engagement technologies that support the delivery of a retail experience that offers mobile shoppers value because it is personal, relevant and convenient.

1. Interactive shopping lists
2. Product location, availability and research tools
3. Contextual 1:1 personalized marketing
4. Simplified payment options
5. Immediate rewards

Significantly, these types of services are decoupled from the mobile client and can be leveraged across a variety of channels as well as across product lines and brands.

In fact, this engagement should cohesively cross channels so that the mobile experience becomes effortlessly integrated with the individual consumer's lifestyle.

Shopping is social

While it is important to offer a mobile experience that is seamlessly integrated into the consumer's lifestyle, it is also important to examine the opportunities introduced via social media and community.

Are there ways to leverage social circles in the mobile app that will enhance the consumer experience?

In an age where a raft of recent consumer surveys point out that shoppers increasingly consult their social communities or read other customer reviews before making a purchase, it is clear that shopping has become a social activity.

In addition, it is certainly useful to have access to targeted and personalized offers, offers perfectly tailored to a specific spouse or relative, delivered via a mobile device when gift shopping.

This is also where collaborative shopping lists include the wishes and interests of the entire family, which can come in to enhance the mobile experience.

In both scenarios the user interface itself should be easy to use, intuitively designed and deliver a delightful experience to the consumer.

This experience should be immediately identifiable with your brand and create interfaces that are relevant and engaging to the consumer.

It is important to engage methodologies such as Design Thinking to work directly with the end-user or consumer in defining specific mobile use cases and how those interactions should be structured to facilitate the way the consumer would naturally engage with your brand.

This is the user engagement that should determine which mobile technologies are employed in the overall consumer experience.

Mobile experience guidelines

Too many mobile apps put technology, not people, first — an approach that can backfire because an organization is more committed to delivering an innovative experience as opposed to providing the consumer an intuitive and elegant design she can use and appreciate.

Beyond engagement via user experience, one must also consider the forces competing for consumer mindshare.

With global competition and the unparalleled availability of information, the consumer is presented with an overwhelming variety of options in the market.

Sheena Iyengar, professor at Columbia Business School and author of *The Art of Choosing*, has studied the impact of choice on consumers.

Ms. Iyengar concludes, “Most of us aren’t experts in everything. We say we want more choices because we want the opportunity to find the perfect choice. But in reality, what we really want is a great choosing experience. To have the confidence in our preferences. To feel competent rather than questioning ourselves, 'Did I really get it right?'”

With so many options in the market, it is often impossible for consumers to feel that they

have adequately evaluated, compared and selected the right products from all the products available on the market.

As a result, retailers and manufacturers are seeing a decline in brand loyalty attributed to the fact that consumers are becoming less sure of their buying decisions.

Successfully engaging the mobile consumer should provide the tools to reverse this trend and deliver a great choosing experience.

Consumer fatigue is particularly evident in loyalty and reward program participation.

There are only so many loyalty membership cards or keychain dongles that a consumer is willing to carry with them.

Mobile apps also appear to have lost their luster. In view of this, organizations that have invested in a mobile presence must develop a strategy that protects their investment and maintains their relevance in the consumer's mobile universe.

Fast-moving mobile

The pace of mobile is moving at a velocity that has not been seen before, with new devices released on a yearly basis and significant revisions to mobile operating systems happening as frequently as two or three times a year.

As device manufacturers deliver new innovation in every release to stay relevant in this super-competitive market, it becomes very difficult for organizations to build and maintain exciting and engaging mobile experiences on those platforms.

Additionally, organizations are challenged with developing mature mobile engagements in an environment where the target is continuously changing.

Thus, many organizations find themselves today in possession of several disjointed mobile apps, all too frequently that have been built within different teams on different platforms.

Furthermore, we find that many of these apps are not part of a larger strategy, as they should be. They have been released as little more than a mobile novelty, seasonal or promotional "Throw away" application, one that rapidly loses relevance and mobile mindshare.

Rather than strengthening the brand message these apps achieve the opposite, becoming chaff and diluting brand value in the app stores.

Organizations should therefore seek to create a more durable mobile presence that provides a consistent foundation of engagement services – such as loyalty and rewards, personalized offers and coupons – de-coupled from the end presentation layer on a specific mobile device, or for that matter, the engagement channel itself.

This foundation should serve as a platform for innovation, allowing an organization to deliver iterative seasonal layouts as well as promotional experiences across multiple device platforms, while the base interactions with the consumer remain consistent and

cohesive across channels.

Consumers in control

A significant paradigm shift that we are seeing in mobile is linked to the emergence of the empowered consumer.

In other words, consumers are demanding and defining their mobile experience.

Indeed, catering to this new kind of consumer, one empowered by advances in online and mobile technologies, is a new experience for many companies.

To engage the mobile consumer and capture their mindshare on their personal mobile device, organizations must deliver value and a relationship that is personalized and intimate, mirroring the relationship users have with their mobile devices.

But organizations cannot stop there.

Organizations that can successfully evolve and create meaningful engagement with the mobile consumer, maintain relevance and keep pace with the ever-changing mobile landscape will outpace their competition over the next five years.

Marketers are challenged with developing mature mobile engagements in an environment where the target is continuously changing.

To maintain and grow that mindshare, the mobile presence needs to evolve and innovate in lock step with the changes made by device manufactures and the changing attitudes of consumers.

BY EMPLOYING a reference architecture and building mobile engagement around a foundation of durable services that deliver cross-channel coherence, marketers can create a platform to reduce risk and promote innovation.

Furthermore, by de-coupling the complexity from the client tier these organizations will avoid technology lock-in and enjoy the flexibility to rapidly uptake new devices, technologies and support new channels as they appear in the market. Those that do this well will redefine how we think about loyalty and brand awareness in the years to come.

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