

COLUMNS

5 mobile marketing myths debunked

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A growing number of marketers are experimenting with and leveraging the mobile medium, learning the best ways to expand their strategic marketing competency, although many have experienced a few bumps along the way.

While this does not cover every misconception out there, the five following myths are offered and debunked to provide marketers with insight around a few common assumptions that can impact how they interact with their customers via the mobile medium. A good starting point is to define the practice of mobile marketing and clarify what it is not.

Myth 1: Mobile marketing means mobile advertising

The Mobile Marketing Association (MMA) defines mobile marketing as “a set of practices that enable organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through any mobile device or network.”

While technically that can include both marketing and advertising, it is critically important to distinguish mobile marketing from mobile advertising and approach your strategic use of them quite differently.

While mobile advertising includes “paid” media, such as banner ads on another brand’s

mobile Web site or paid mobile search campaigns in Google, mobile marketing is about “owned” and “earned” media.

It is more about your brand outlets and channels, your content and your desire to build long-term customer relationships than it is about creating ads. Think about the differences between public relations and advertising – it is very similar.

While mobile advertising continues to make technology advances and provide more options for your ads, you are still using someone else’s Web site, application or channel.

With mobile marketing programs, you are enabling consumers to interact with your brand by delivering information to their mobile phones where you can control the experience.

Because of that, we believe that mobile marketing programs – when done well – are almost always going to be more insightful to consumer behavior and return better results.

This is not to imply that mobile advertising should not play a role in your overall marketing budget – it probably should – but if you are looking for a mobile marketing partner, simply engaging with one to develop an advertising program is a missed opportunity.

Myth 2: An iPhone app equals a mobile strategy

When we ask potential clients if their company is doing mobile marketing, many of them proudly say, “Yes, we’ve launched both iPhone and Android apps.” That is a great start, but how are they reaching the other half of U.S. consumers?

ComScore reports that 58 percent of Americans own smartphones and 90 percent of smartphone owners have iOS or Android, so you are looking at reaching just 52 percent of Americans with your iOS and Android apps.

Smartphone apps are just one piece of your marketing puzzle in the way that mobile advertising is just part of the marketing picture.

Apps alone do not have wide enough reach. There is not a particular marketing channel – digital or otherwise – that offers the highest reach, engagement and ROI.

Your challenge as a marketer is creating the right recipe of mobile marketing programs – for example apps, SMS, mobile Web, mobile-optimized email or QR codes – with your other marketing channels.

Just as we would not advocate only using text message marketing, mobile touch points must be integrated across your organization and offer multiple opportunities for customer interaction and loyalty building for success in mobile marketing.

Myth 3: Mobile marketing is complicated

Admittedly, this one actually has some truth to it.

There is complexity around the carrier connections needed, the set of rules you need to follow, and the mobile technology options available, but the underlying use cases and

common sense required to run effective mobile programs are similar to other marketing channels.

Ask yourself questions such as, “Does this meet my customer’s needs?” and “Am I adding value to the customer relationship?” and “Is this an effective use of my marketing dollars?”

If you can answer those questions positively and have a trusted mobile technology partner, implementing mobile marketing programs is not complicated. And that often means not rushing toward the latest and greatest marketing technology just because you can, such as augmented reality or a complicated user experience.

You can keep things simple with smart opt-in SMS communications, perhaps paired with a mobile microsite, and still see powerful results.

Myth 4: All mobile users are all the same

One of the reasons companies provide for not investing in mobile marketing is they believe it is not relevant to their demographic targets, that mobile only reaches Generation Y, or only reaches those with smartphones, or only those who are traveling.

Both third-party research and our direct experience supporting client programs debunks those assumptions.

Addressing the question of age, Google’s “Our Mobile Planet” shows that 55 percent of Americans ages 30-49 and 25 percent of those over 50 owned smartphones.

As for mobile only reaching those on the go outside the home, Google reports that 52 percent of all smartphone users watch television while on their smartphones, and a study from Telefónica’s O2 UK and Sony Mobile showed that 75 percent of the respondents used their phone while in the bathroom.

So while mobile users may be close to home or far away, as a marketer you should not make assumptions about them.

Myth 5: Mobile marketing is creepy

Do you worry about giving your mobile number to a company for fear of them sending you unwanted texts or calls? Do you think it is a bit intrusive to be walking by a store in the mall and get an instant alert on your phone that calls you by name to tell you the store is having a sale? You are not alone.

Mobile phone technology enables precise location tracking, which can be extremely helpful while using a mapping application but disconcerting when used without your knowledge or in ways you do not like.

But the reality is that when it comes to short code-based text messaging campaigns, the wireless carriers have in place strict consumer-focused opt-in guidelines, and Congress is bringing bills to the floor to discuss mobile privacy laws through applications and Web sites.

Those companies who do not obey have their programs shut off, are heavily fined, and

are typically publicly dragged through the media for these practices.

Remember when online privacy concerns were a huge roadblock for ecommerce from taking off?

With \$225.5 billion in retail ecommerce sales last year, it is fair to conclude that we are officially over that hurdle. The same can be expected regarding the trajectory of mobile privacy concerns.

There will still be a few unwanted text messages occurring and companies with unscrupulous practices, but it is unlikely that SMS spam will become widespread like it has with email and direct mail.

THE BOTTOM LINE is that companies have to earn consumers' express consent and must remain in compliance in order to take advantage of the benefits of mobile marketing. The industry is set up to ensure that.

Just as online privacy concerns are fading into the background, mobile consumers will learn to trust brands that have proven to be trustworthy.

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