

COLUMNS

How mobile can enhance the holiday shopping season

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Until 15 year ago, the holiday season meant consumers would have to drive out to a store, fight long lines and deal with out-of-stock inventory.

The introduction of ecommerce changed holiday shopping forever by bringing the retail store into the consumer's home, providing a new level of convenience.

This holiday season the game has changed again as retailers bring their brand and store to the consumers' palm.

For this holiday season, purchases in the physical store and on Web sites could find competition in the form of a smaller package.

Hip holidays

The 2010 holiday season will usher in mobile as the new shopping channel on the block.

According to ABI Research, 2009 generated \$1.1 billion in transactions for physical goods through mobile devices and some prognosticators predict that that number could double for 2010.

What is driving this number? Two major factors: adoption and sophistication.

Smartphone adoption is increasing exponentially with each new device introduced to the market.

According to research firm Strategy Analytics, the United States alone has 60 million smartphone users to date, with that number expected to continue growing for the foreseeable future.

Perhaps a more important factor is the increase in sophistication and power being introduced on these smartphones.

With larger screen sizes and resolutions that match your Web-optimized laptop computer at the turn of this century, mobile shopping is becoming less painful and more relevant.

Also, the introduction of the tablet is providing an even richer browsing and shopping experience, and has consolidated the benefits of the larger screen size of a laptop computer with the finger-friendly touch screen gestures of the mobile phone.

Web feat

Make no mistake – there are nuances between the management of your Web site and a mobile shopping experience.

This is why when retailers build out a mobile strategy, it is important to keep that strategy focused on their core business.

Of the two primary delivery models for mobile commerce, mobile Web and native applications, mobile Web provides the advantage of data synchronization with an ecommerce Web site, which is critical for the holidays.

Product catalog, pricing, promotions and inventory must be consistent and updated in real-time due to selling volume.

Native applications can be ideal for retailers that have a large number of repeat shoppers such as Amazon.com or eBay, but for a specialty retailer, such as a major appliance manufacturer where purchasing is infrequent, downloading an application is unlikely.

One important factor to focus on year-round, not just during the holidays, is to look beyond the direct revenue generated by mobile devices and focus on the multichannel capabilities that the smartphone provides.

The mobile experience heavily influences purchasing through other channels, such as informing and enabling in-store transactions.

During the holidays when consumers are pressed for time, there will be a heavy reliance placed on mobile devices for delivering product information, ratings and reviews, and pricing.

All indicators point to 2010 being the first holiday season where mobile will make an impact on sales, not just through the phone, but all retail channels.

With multitasking becoming a habit practiced by more consumers and with the freedom to buy products whenever and wherever you are, such as during a bus ride or while sitting in a waiting room, there is no telling how fast this channel could grow.

Here are three important things to remember when enhancing the mobile experience during the holiday season:

1) Simplify the shopping experience: A great way to help out mobile shoppers is to push

out gift ideas to the mobile device.

If someone browses a mobile storefront, make it easy for the shopper by featuring the “Top 10 Gifts for Dad” or “Gifts for Girls.” This cuts down on browsing time and eliminates steps, which is especially important with all the shopping pressure during the holiday season.

2) One-click check out: Today, cart abandonment is most prevalent on payment page of the checkout process.

Mobile shoppers take issue with typing in all their contact, payment and shipping information through small thumb-driven keyboard, especially during the holidays when time is precious.

As a result, retailers need express payment types such as PayPal Express and Amazon Checkout to speed the process, cutting down on data entry.

Also, the mobile site should be able to identify repeat customers to pre-populate this information during checkout to speed the transaction through to completion.

3) Add self-service capabilities: During the holidays, especially near crunch time, tracking orders is critical to getting that gift on time. Make sure consumers can get up to date order and shipping information.

SINCE MOBILE is a key component to any multichannel retail strategy, retailers must remain consistent across channels in terms of promotions from Web store to mobile, and store to mobile device. The holidays serve only to exacerbate this rule.

There will be customer dissatisfaction if there is a consumer standing in the store with their mobile phone looking at two different prices for the same product.

Mobile commerce may not be in full stride yet, but the 2010 holiday season will be remembered as the turning point for consumer acceptance of mobile as a viable shopping outlet.

This is why it is essential to build a strong mobile strategy for this holiday season as it will set the tone for future sales to come. Remember, the power to find the perfect gift is now in the palm of your customers' hands.

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