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Top 10 mobile trends for brands in 2014

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It is that time of the year again. Last year was incredible for mobile and, if anything, 2014 is shaping up to be even more momentous and exciting.

For starters, 2014 is the year we can finally stop breathlessly declaring “this is going to be the year of mobile,” because it is manifestly apparent to just about everyone. (The only unfortunate thing is that I now have to find an extra trend to round out my Top 10.)

1. Mobile first

In 2014, mobile will be the first screen for a majority of people. There will be more mobile subscriptions than there are people in the world this year.

According to comScore, 2014 is also the year in which there will be more mobile Internet users than desktop users globally.

In the United States, adults already spend more time on mobile than they do on desktop browsing, according to eMarketer.

For the vast majority of Americans – 80 percent, to be precise – a mobile screen is the first thing they look at in the morning and the last thing they look at before going to sleep.

Mobile is not just another medium by which your customers interact with your brand. It is fast becoming the primary channel through which they are doing so.

You would think that everyone would have gotten the message by now. And yet, more than 45 percent of businesses do not even have a mobile-friendly Web site, according to Adobe.

2. The rise of the wearables and the Internet of Things

Mobile no longer means just your phone. Or your tablet. It is your eyeglasses. Your watch. Your bracelet. Even your car. And quite possibly the clothes you wear.

Wearables, as all these devices are called, are going to become a lot more mainstream in 2014.

Business Insider predicts that more than 100 million units of wearable devices will be shipped in 2014, double that of 2013.

But wearables are only one small part of the total set of connected devices that are coming online and fast becoming mainstream.

The Internet of Things, as the universe of connected devices has come to be called, will quickly dwarf all of today's traditional connected devices such as smartphones and PCs.

Business Insider predicts that there will be 9 billion IoT devices in 2018 – more than all the traditional connected devices combined.

These connected devices, at least the consumer facing ones, present both a marketing opportunity and a challenge for brands.

Imagine your connected fridge letting you know you are out of milk – and then sending a coupon for milk to your phone when you are in the grocery store.

The challenge lies in that marketers will need to work hard to tease out the opportunity for each of the different device types, and each one will have its own unique format and requirements.

3. PeCoLo: Mobile is about me

Personalization. Contextualization. Location.

Mobile devices are becoming more intimate and have access to and are collecting and processing more data about their users than ever before.

In addition to obvious contextual clues such as location and time of day, mobile devices in coming years will have access to a whole slew of highly personal data sets including a user's vital signs, their transaction histories and social media interactions.

As a result, generic one-size-fits-all experiences are fast becoming extinct and consumers are coming to expect their interactions with mobile be a lot more customized to their unique needs and habits, as well as contextually aware of their current state.

Marketers too will need to incorporate PeCoLo into their marketing strategies: they will need to leverage mobile intelligently to collect data about their consumers, create an ecosystem with partners that allows them to effectively utilize that information and deploy

campaigns, target and narrowcast their messaging and promotions to specific groups or individuals and create a virtuous feedback cycle to constantly refine and fine-tune the experiences.

4. Social is mobile

Seventy-three percent of Facebook's users access the service through mobile and nearly 50 percent of its revenues come through mobile ads.

For Twitter, 75 percent of monthly active users access the service through mobile, and mobile is responsible for more than 65 percent of revenues.

Even on YouTube, mobile accounts for 40 percent of video play time globally. And, yeah, Instagram is 100 percent mobile by design.

This is the year in which social media becomes mobile, period.

Marketers need to adjust accordingly, ensuring that all content posted is not just mobile-friendly, but is conceived and curated with the understanding that it will be consumed on mobile – and should therefore be tailored to leverage all that the medium offers (e.g. location, immediacy and frequency of use).

5. Privacy strikes back, sort of

Two notable events of 2013 are likely to affect just how public our personal information is going to be in the years to come.

The NSA leaks by Edward Snowden put the spotlight on the right to privacy, and the resulting fallout will likely lead to more stringent rules around data protection.

The rise of Snapchat and other ephemeral social networks provide a stark contrast to Facebook and Twitter, as user data is not public and only exists for as long as it takes you to consume it.

Individual data is going to be a lot less freely available than it was before – and attitudes towards the usage of that data may change, albeit slowly and over time.

Marketers will continue to need to be more transparent about what data they are collecting from consumers and ensure there is a clear payoff in terms of value provided back to the consumer for the data collected.

6. No mobile moolah

Mobile commerce will continue to grow by leaps and bounds.

According to eMarketer, mobile commerce was expected to grow 68 percent in 2013 and account for 16 percent of all ecommerce sales, and is expected to grow at 30-plus percent for the next few years as well.

Mobile payments, on the other hand, fizzled in 2013 and are unlikely to sizzle in 2014 either, despite a lot of new activity in the space.

ISIS, the mobile wallet created by a consortium of the major wireless carriers, debuted to less than stellar reviews in November, as did Paypal's mobile wallet.

Google Wallet seems to have lost its way, along with its chief in May.

MCX, another mobile wallet, this time created by a consortium of large retailers, is supposed to launch sometime in 2014.

Probably the cleverest payment innovation coming down the pike in 2014 is in good old credit cards, with Coin, an electronic credit card device that consolidates all your physical credit cards (full disclosure: I ordered one and cannot wait).

7. Always on shopping

According to Google, 84 percent of smartphone shoppers use their phones while in a physical store.

And a comScore report pointed out that consumers now spend more time interacting with online retailers on smartphones and tablets than they do on desktops and laptops.

Even when users are not actually purchasing items on their phones – although they are doing a lot more of that too – they are constantly using their mobile phones to assist with their purchase activities.

This use of mobile as an always-on shopping aid is affecting the way that consumers view purchasing – and how marketers should approach shopper marketing.

Marketers should be looking to deeply integrate mobile into their shopper marketing programs. They should look to provide consumers with additional product information and contextually relevant offers and promotions through mobile, as well as use mobile as a channel for loyalty and rewards programs.

Customers are going to be better informed and more aware than they have ever been, and marketers will have to continually work towards earning and keeping their loyalty.

8. Second screen for life

Augmented reality and wearables such as Google Glass will combine to make mobile a second screen for your life.

In 2013 augmented reality was just about emerging into primetime, with most campaigns still being experimental and having limited impact, the big honking exception being, of course, IKEA's use of AR in its catalog.

In 2014 and beyond, expect to see augmented reality provide an overlay to your everyday life, doing everything from recognizing people's faces to guiding you through complicated repair processes.

Marketers that manage to package true utility into their augmented reality campaigns as opposed to just providing a virtual experience are going to engender real customer appreciation.

9. Bye bye, mobile advertising

Mobile advertising as we know it is going to change dramatically in 2014.

It is clear that display ads and 30-second repackaged television spots do not really work that well on mobile.

Native advertising was the buzzword of 2013 and even though definitions around what it is exactly differ, expect to see a lot more of it in 2014 – particularly as types of devices proliferate.

Also, expect to see more gamification of mobile ads and a lot more mobile video of 5- and 10-second duration.

As more devices come into the fold of mobile, it is unlikely that there will be standardization in formats across the entire medium for the next few years. Rather, each platform will create the formats and units that work best for it.

10. App rationalization

Last year I had confidently predicted that HTML5 mobile Web sites would crowd out mobile applications as marketers realized that they were far more cost-effective and offered the similar functionality. I was wrong.

According to Flurry, 80 percent of time spent on mobile is with apps and only 20 percent is on the mobile browser.

App icons are still coveted real estate on smartphones, precisely because consumers tend to interact with apps much more than they do with the browser.

That being said, marketers are becoming much more realistic about developing apps.

According to a Compuware study, 80 percent to 90 percent of all downloaded apps are used once and then eventually deleted by users, and only about 1,000 applications have at least 50,000 users in the United States, according to Onavo.

Expect brands to consider and experiment with a variety of different strategies for developing and distributing apps – creating special branded versions of already popular mobile apps and games, consolidating and pruning their app portfolios, co-branding or co-marketing apps, and creating consortia of likeminded brands for specific functional apps.

ALL IN ALL, 2014 promises to be a yet another exciting and surprising year for mobile and I cannot wait to see what as-yet-unimagined-things will shape and shift the industry. Happy New Year.

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