

If you're treating mobile as a 'channel,' you're getting it all wrong

Carla Fitzgerald, Smith Micro Software May 21, 2016 9:03 AM



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In a March 2016 article, Marketing Land columnist Josh Todd nailed it when he wrote that “we’re in the midst of a mobile engagement crisis.” To back up this claim, Todd cites eye-opening stats like:

- 50 percent of users see push notifications as annoying
- 35 percent of push messages are still blasted to all users
- 44 percent of companies state that mobile services are simply a scaled-down version of their online initiatives

Mobile engagement also has different challenges in different industries. For financial institutions, it’s finding the right balance between the efficiencies afforded by mobile banking and the importance of maintaining the human element that builds customer loyalty. For retailers, the pressure is on to tie mobile into the omni-channel shopping experience. Those in the hospitality industry struggle with bridging the gaps between legacy systems, third-party booking systems, and mobile loyalty apps, while trying to engage each guest on a personal level.

The plethora of enabling technologies now available to drive mobile engagement only compounds these challenges as many businesses are deploying them out without considering the long-term impact on customer experience. For instance:

- Beacon-based or location-centric approaches to mobile engagement are good at detecting proximity for engaging customers in the right place but lack the ability to detect other contextual information, like day, time, dwell-time, and frequency, which are important to determine if it’s the right time to engage. Location also doesn’t determine the right content for a particular customer.
- Third-party advertising channels and shopping apps provide a broad reach, but offer limited and often inaccurate targeting, which can result in irrelevant promotions. In addition, these third parties, not the advertiser, own the valuable customer data they collect.
- Mobile websites are fairly easy to deploy, but like location-based approaches, they lack context-sensing features to determine “right place, right time” and other customer conditions. Further, a web-driven engagement model depends on network connectivity, which is often unreliable even when available.

These technology approaches all suffer from a consistent industry problem. They treat mobile as a channel, which only serves to negate the real value of mobile: It’s personal and it’s intimate. Many of us sleep with our phones close at hand, and the millennial generation would more likely leave the house without a wallet than without a phone. As such, mobile engagement must be approached as a relationship.

To create a mobile relationship, just like any other relationship, you need to listen. That means gathering intelligence about your customer that isn't just based on historical behavior; it includes the here-and-now. By detecting and acting upon contextual mobile "cues" from each customer in real-time, such as proximity, dwell-time, device activity, and apps in use, businesses can deliver a personalized, and therefore memorable, mobile experience. A more sophisticated approach to gathering device-based intelligence and using it to determine when, where, and how to engage your customer is a cornerstone of building the mobile relationship.

Customers never forget their first surprisingly great brand experience ... or a particularly bad one. The opportunity is here right now for marketing leaders to change their approach to mobile and create the personalized brand experience customers crave. To do that, you don't add mobile to your marketing mix, you put mobile in the middle.

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