COLUMNS

Defining customer experience and support in the new app economy

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By Sona Sharma

With 1.2 billion smartphones on hand worldwide and with 26 applications downloaded per phone, it is clear that we have entered the new app economy.

However, such volumes of equipment and mobile in-app activity begs the question that how much of this is being used to drive revenue through the mobile medium and what does it take for a business to succeed in the growing mobile commerce market?

It is no secret that customer experience is the key to success for any kind of business, but even more so in the mobile world because there is a certain sense of urgency and a sense of convenience attached to the use of our mobile device.

If a business cannot hook the customers in within the first few attempts in engaging with a brand on a mobile device, then it will have lost them to a competitor. This requires a smooth experience while in the app, without any hiccups or error messages from the start to the successful culmination of the transaction or any other activity for which the app is being used.

However, as things stand now, such a flawless in-app experience is wishful thinking.

Numbers speak low volumes
A study by Compuware on mobile apps revealed that 85 percent of those surveyed said they preferred mobile apps primarily because apps are more convenient, faster and easier to browse.

However, only 28 percent noted that mobile apps offer a better user experience.

Additionally, 56 percent of the participants said they had encountered a problem accessing a mobile app within the last six months. Among those who experienced a problem, 62 percent reported a crash, freeze or error; 47 percent experienced slow launch times; and 40 percent reported an app that would not launch.

As a result, businesses are struggling with low app retention rate, low customer engagement and low conversion rate. In short, this is a missed revenue opportunity.

Clearly, mobile commerce is at a risk of not achieving its full potential if we do not alleviate the situation. And the obvious answer that comes to mind is customer support and service while in the app.

But can the traditional paradigms of customer support scale to such volumes of mobile devices and apps?

App low down

I think that the new app economy has rendered the traditional paradigms of support obsolete. They are too little, too late.

Currently, if a user has any issues with while interacting with the app, they are forced to:

a. Either abandon the task

b. Or try again and hope to succeed

c. Or move out of the app, open a browser, find a static FAQ and hunt for a solution

d. Or locate a phone number on a browser, call for help, explain his or her predicament and hope to find a solution

Is there not something totally wrong with this picture?

Especially since all this while the app was aware of who the user is, where the user is, what the problem is and what is the size of the transaction.

The app is context aware, but the support system is not. The tools available to enable a successful outcome and experience for an app user right now are not as dynamic as the new-age customers would want them to be.

Things are changing, though.

Fired up
Last year, Amazon introduced a Mayday button on Kindle Fire HDX to provide live video chat for customers.

Then this year, Salesforce announced the inclusion of an SOS support button in 2015.

These life-saving blinking buttons can connect a bewildered consumer struggling with error messages to a live support person in a jiffy.

This is definitely a step in the right direction. These in-app support buttons do not force the user to step out of the app when an issue occurs. Help is on its way.

But let us look at it from the point of view of all businesses. Can every enterprise carry the cost of providing live video chat to all customers?

Additionally, mobile app developers also have to contend with long app release cycles to make any fixes.

Meanwhile, they struggle to enable support on apps using existing call center infrastructure that are clearly not optimized to support a real-time, context-aware channel.

And does every customer, from a 15-year-old kid making a $10 purchase to someone doing a $1,500 transaction, require the same level of TLC from a live support person?

I THINK that while every customer deserves prompt, real-time support and a pleasant mobile experience, the level of handholding provided can vary depending on the real-time mobile context of the customer.

So, while a high-quality customer experience is critical for success in mobile commerce, context-aware tiered support is key to enabling all businesses to offer a high-quality experience to all their customers.

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