

COLUMNS

## Beacons will under-deliver here's why

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By [Matt Ramerman](#)

Every year, there is a product or category in mobile that stretches the bounds of hype.

You remember the 2009 promise of mobile wallet? Hey, cash is still here.

Augmented reality: How much product has moved in the last half-decade because of this cool but at least as-yet unmonetizable "solution?"

Beacons are the hands-down winner of the current hype award.

Stories about beacons are everywhere. Results from beacons programs? Much rarer.

Here is a bit more about beacons before I share a better way to go.

Shining light

Positioned as the panacea, beacons supposedly give marketers unmatched access to consumers at particular locations.

For those who have not kept up despite the flood of attention, beacons are small, inexpensive pieces of hardware that broadcast a Bluetooth signal intended to be recognized when a Bluetooth-enabled mobile device is in close proximity.

What can you do with it? You can send targeted and contextual information, specific to an individual small area where the mobile user is standing.

Beacons work in conjunction with a mobile application and an associated content/campaign management platform to enable the app to identify its location and proximity to points or items of interest.

Here is the seminal challenge. Beacons work with apps, meaning the consumer needs to have downloaded your app, not to mention, granted you permission to reach out to him or her with push and local notifications.

For many years, we have worked and worked to market and build awareness for our apps, but where has that left us? Square in a very crowded contest for the consumer's attention.

Mobile users download an average of 100 apps yearly, according to Flurry. How many they use vary, but it is often said that the number is 20 percent or even fewer.

Read the text

Here is the better way: opting in mobile users via Wi-Fi and reaching out to them with mobile messaging text messaging or multimedia messaging/MMS when they are in your proximity.

And, unlike the app route, both of these functionalities are native to virtually every customer's mobile devices. No halving your addressable customer base here.

The consumer's initial entry into your loyalty club comes with a double opt-in to conform with all TCPA regulations and best practices. The event also provides the opportunity to walk through such valuable information as to how many times a month that the user can expect to receive messages from you.

And unlike many beacon programs, you can include Android and iOS users.

Technically, the program works this way. Once a user opts in to your mobile club via your Wi-Fi, the network recognizes and remembers the phone's media access control address. The Mac address is a unique identifier assigned to network interfaces.

Since you have their permission, you can reach out to them whenever they are within your particular Wi-Fi area.

Tie the opt-in user to transaction data and a dynamic content rendering engine, and you have the ability to communicate one-to-one with your customer, delivering hyper-targeted, relevant content every time.

Of course, there is great value in reaching consumers in the so-called moment.

Marketers like you can enhance customer interaction by providing localized, relevant content.

Further, mobile campaigns can be managed and measured through access to real-time, detailed customer data.

Click?

According to Google, 61 percent of smartphone users want ads tied to their immediate location.

And what should you send them? Mobile messaging with video is the most powerful direct marketing tool available.

The MMS channel picks up where SMS text messaging leaves off. It is highly scalable and can include a long text message greater than 160 characters with images, audio files and video.

This powerful utility allows for managing numerous scenarios in support of the call to-action: Text and links can be dynamically inserted including click-to-call, click-to-view the closest location, click-to-download application, click-to-open native application and, perhaps most important, click-to-buy.

LOCATION IS a key to your 2015 marketing success. But beacons will take you down the wrong road.

Instead, opt-in proximity marketing using Wi-Fi is well insulated from the shortcomings associated with other proximity solutions such as device support, app clutter and network address randomization.

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