

COLUMNS

Why chat messaging apps are a location-based alternative to geofencing

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By **Bo Larsson**

"Don't call me. I don't like talking on the phone. Don't even think about leaving a voice mail. Who uses voice mail, anyway?"

"Email? Email takes too long to read. TV? I stream it."

"If you want to reach out to me, send me a text or a chat."

This behavior is the hallmark of millennial and Generation Z consumers, two younger-skewing population groups raised on the Internet and increasingly characterized by their almost-sole dependence on smartphones and mobile devices for key life activities personal communications, media consumption, photography, videos, music, browsing, shopping, entertainment, advertising and connecting.

This same pattern of behavior can create headaches for mobile marketers, who often struggle to find the most effective, targeted ways of reaching these tech-reliant consumers.

Born in the last three decades, millennials and Gen-Z represent a new breed: always-on consumers, well adapted to technology, and willing to explore and use new communication channels.

Some marketers are finding success with messaging apps, which are growing in popularity.

According to Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers partner Mary Meeker's 2015 Internet Trends Report, six of the 10 most-used applications globally are messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.

Younger consumers, in particular, show a growing preference for texting and messaging over more traditional social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, according to Ms. Meeker. They prefer instantaneous communication channels rather than email, phone calls or other social media outlets, which tend to require more time or effort.

"Message bubbles that follow consumers"

On the theory that marketers must tread in the same waters as their customers, chat messaging represents an avenue of opportunity for brands to connect with millennials and Gen-Z in a format they already embrace and use.

Even more specifically, hyperlocal chat messaging apps which support proximity messaging in pre-defined geographic areas can help marketers deploy geo-targeted mobile marketing campaigns without relying on geofencing.

Without knowing others' email addresses, telephone numbers or contact information, brands and marketers can

deliver hyperlocal messages to nearby users, either to join conversations that are already occurring or to create newfound interest and curiosity.

Marketers who think about chat-app-delivered content as a message bubble that follows a customer's life can leverage content so that customers pursue the bubble to find out more or make nearby connections.

Messages delivered through chat apps can include questions, solicitations for information, invitations, promotions, event information, unique offers, daily specials and the like.

Ideally, the content should be compelling, able to elicit a response, invite exploration or encourage recipients to meet/visit/engage in person.

Geographically tailored content makes connections

Hyperlocal messaging apps are ideal for geographically defined marketing opportunities, including small businesses eager to connect with nearby customers or passersby, or events such as festivals, community fairs, concerts, entertainment and sporting venues.

At the July 11 Phono del Sol Music and Food Festival in San Francisco, for example, organizers, sponsors and bands deployed a hyperlocal chat messaging app to offer festival goers event-only content freebies, discounts, promotions and musical content.

These kinds of apps are also well-suited for geography-defined communities, including universities, schools, neighborhoods, condos or homeowners' associations, farmers' markets, hotels, resorts any place where like-minded people gather and can benefit from information, knowledge, connections to others, advice or an offer that is too good to turn down.

The benefit to chat messaging apps is that content can invite users, including nearby strangers, to explore, inquire about, connect with and receive information from the surrounding environment, whether that involves businesses, other app users, like-minded souls or complete strangers.

As such, messaging apps act as social media excitement generators creating buzz in specific places based on activity levels, curiosity, interaction and responses from nearby app users.

Getting people who are near each other to begin chatting it up even before they know each other increases the likelihood that they will meet, explore and engage in the immediate environment, whatever or wherever it is.

For businesses and marketers, responses from chat messaging apps can also be monitored, responded to and used to build audiences for further engagement or more targeted, segmented marketing later.

All mobile marketers today struggle with the right combination of content, audience and opportunity to make connections between brands, customers and potential customers.

CHAT MESSAGING apps represent a unique and increasingly popular tool for hyperlocal marketing without relying on separate geofencing capabilities.

The question for today's marketers is: if nearby consumers or passersby are chatting up your brand, store or business in a chat app, are you listening and ready to join the conversation?

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