

COLUMNS

How mobile bar codes enable cross-channel commerce

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As readers of this publication know, mobile is not just another customer communications medium it is rapidly evolving into an effective marketing and sales channel, enabling consumers to get information whenever and wherever they want, and empowering commerce anywhere.

To help drive commerce initiatives not only via the mobile medium but also across channels, retailers should consider generating and enabling mobile bar code functionality.

A newer concept in the United States, mobile bar code technology used extensively in Asia and gaining traction in Europe presents significant potential benefits to retailers.

With this functionality, consumers can use their smartphones as a type of scanner, but one that does much more than simply show the price of a product.

Store score

Many of the newer phones, including the newest model iPhone, Android and BlackBerry, for example, can deliver this functionality. But there are still many retailers not leveraging this powerful cross-channel commerce enabler.

To put this into context, consider your in-store products.

There is typically little space on the shelves to explain the merchandise. Placing a bar code on the products which a consumer can scan with his phone gives the consumer a way to instantly access information on the product, including customer reviews, a promotion and additional product details via a Web page linked to the bar code.

Faster and more efficient than requiring someone to type a product or model number into your main Web site page on her phone, the bar code can effectively help guide and encourage a purchasing decision on the spot.

Mobile bar codes can also help drive store traffic.

For example, a customer may buy something online, and as a thank-you, you can then email that customer an in-store coupon or voucher with a bar code.

The customer can show this email at the register, and the store clerk can simply scan the bar code during checkout without the customer ever having to print anything out. This makes it as easy as possible for the customer and helps encourage sales.

Social code

Another way that mobile bar codes can be used is in conjunction with an advertising campaign.

Consider including a bar code next to a product image in an advertisement. Using her mobile phone, a consumer can scan the bar code and immediately be directed to your mobile Web site.

From there, the consumer can place the product in a shopping cart for immediate purchase, or purchase later from her PC. It can take just a few minutes from a consumer reading an advertisement to turn that experience into a sale.

Bar codes can be included on billboard advertisements as well, with the same outcome.

Your customers can even help support sales by leveraging mobile bar code technology through the use of social media.

Creating their own viral, community-driven marketing programs, customers may share coupons with Facebook friends or may re-tweet sales offers with links to bar codes.

Using your ecommerce system, you can place controls on how many coupons may be available or how long these offers may run.

Mobile bar code functionality delivers many benefits to both retailers and customers and helps to link cross-channel commerce initiatives.

Such functionality presents you with a way to encourage a sale at the moment the customer is engaged with your business wherever he or she may be and enables that customer to easily and immediately make that purchase in a way that works best for him or her.

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