

COLUMNS

Using Web site best practice to increase mobile site conversion

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At the beginning of every year for the past decade, we have heard industry experts proclaim that it will be the "year of the mobile Web."

Now we are saying it again, but this time it looks like the real deal. This year will be the true test of brand marketers' mobile madness and aptitude as consumers continue to turn to their Web-enabled mobile devices as a daily means of quick, on-the-go brand interaction, buying research and, now, shopping.

A recent comScore survey found that the United States is home to 60.7 million smartphone users, up 14 percent from the previous quarter.

With smartphone use on the rise, mobile marketers who are not using conversion optimization and Web site personalization techniques on their mobile sites will fall behind as mobile-savvy competitors take the lead in market share growth in 2011.

Optimizing mobile sites

Mobile site development and usability have been challenging, uncharted territories for most online marketers. To be effective, I have found that mobile sites need to be:

Tested (multivariate and A/B testing) and optimized so that consumers are continuously served relevant (and only relevant) content

Designed specifically so that content and design fit the limited size of mobile screens

Personalized so that consumers receive the information they need, when they need it

It is critical to remember that not everything is relevant in a mobile environment.

The trick is to figure out what your customers need most from you in their on-the-go lives.

For example, retail consumers typically use their handheld devices to locate stores quickly or compare prices, but

not to browse through dense pages of product information and promotional offers.

Similarly, banking consumers might feel comfortable using their handheld devices to check their account balances, but not to apply for a mortgage.

Make sure you know what your customers need and want from their mobile environment, before you determine the content, design and layout.

Making mobile marketing work

The world of mobile marketing is becoming increasingly competitive as more brands dip their toes in the mobile waters.

We experienced a very similar trend a few years ago when conversion optimization for standard Web sites emerged.

Multivariate testing, A/B testing, segment targeting and Web site personalization on traditional Web sites have proven to be very effective tools for increasing conversion rates and online revenue.

But now, marketers must put the same tools and best practices to work for handhelds.

Amazon's continued dominance in the ecommerce industry is a result of its ability to rigorously test, personalize and optimize its sites.

Online marketers who follow Amazon's lead for their mobile site content from the onset will gain a foothold in the mobile commerce industry. Those who do not will lose the opportunity to lead the market.

Get ahead of the game

Fortunately, we now possess the technology to continuously perform mobile A/B and multivariate testing, which pinpoints the most relevant combination of content and design for your audience.

In my experience, testing is the fastest and most effective way to pull out the strongest features of your mobile site and optimize accordingly.

However, testing solutions are only truly valuable if you make the content and design modifications in real-time.

Often, such technologies also have the ability to recognize differences between the wide range of mobile devices and platforms, and serve the most relevant content in an effective design, based on screen size, resolution and alignment.

Mobile site optimization ensures that your customers can receive the content they need, how they need it and when they need it most.

Personalize the mobile experience

Once your mobile site is optimized for your general audience, it is important to personalize the experience for each individual.

Web site personalization for the mobile experience further ensures that customers' needs are met, but also allows them to feel a closer connection to your brand.

Handheld digital devices serve personal data storage purposes for emails, appointments and presentations, often painting a near-complete picture of a person's lifestyle and preferences.

Many consumers consider these devices to be an extension of them, which is why it is crucial for them to be able to access a mobile site that meets their individual needs and desires.

The key to Web site personalization is a strong conversion optimization platform that allows you to reach consumers with ideal content for the mobile environment.

Due to the lack of real estate for multiple messages, it is more important for mobile sites to be personalized to the individual than traditional Web sites.

However, while using data about individuals and how they interact with a brand through traditional online means, the mobile Web and other channels provide an opportunity for marketers to nail their brand messaging.

Marketers must combine and analyze information about a consumer's device, including the time of the day, day of the week, the points from which they access specific pages and their movement throughout the mobile site.

By serving the right information to the right individual in the right format, marketers can make every visitor count.

Allow for communication between channels

Time and time again, I see companies optimizing in silos, failing to properly connect their mobile efforts with the rest of their marketing strategy.

Yet, customers are, and will continue to, engage with brands across multiple channels.

Whether a customer uses a Web site, mobile site or bricks-and-mortar store, her brand experience should be consistent and personalized to her preferences and needs regardless of the channel.

Few marketers currently take advantage of multichannel marketing tools that can create a 360-degree detailed view of each customer, and empower effective, automated Web site personalization during their mobile experience and beyond.

Marketers should be engaging with multichannel marketing now to outperform competitors.

AS THE MOBILE expands over the next year and more companies understand the benefits of these tools, conversion optimization and Web site personalization services for mobile are likely to gain significant popularity.

Marketers that take the leap today with these services will certainly find themselves ahead of the curve tomorrow.

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