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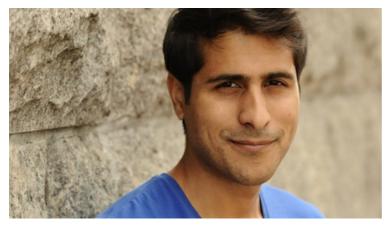
Business at its best

How retailers can get the most out of Apple's iMessage update

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By Bobby Gill

Apple's latest iOS 10 update, released earlier this fall, has empowered retailers and developers with new tools for driving app usage and engagement.

One useful change that you have probably noticed is that Web site links can now be auto-previewed within the iMessage application.

Further, message threads have become more dynamic, allowing users to initiate activity from apps directly within iMessage.

On message
For instance, users can launch a game such as "Words with Friends" without ever leaving the chat experience.

Want to coordinate a shared ride between friends? Uber's iMessage app extension allows you to book through a coordinated effort right within your conversation.

With the new iMessage platform you can even make a dinner reservation, or order takeout and split and submit payment, again without having to leave your conversation.

The updated iMessage platform opens up a wide variety of opportunity for retailers looking to boost engagement with their apps.

By centralizing mobile experiences, retailers can seamlessly enter peer-to-peer conversations in natural and organic ways at least among iPhone users who account for more than 40 percent of all smartphone owners.

According to one report, app publishers enabling the iMessage framework are already seeing a boost in downloads.

Here is how retailers, in particular, can reap immediate benefits from the update:

Search and share products directly from iMessage
Apple has provided the necessary connective tissue between iMessage and mobile apps to allow for the two to

integrate like never before.

However, for retailers to take full advantage of the development, they will need to expand their current apps with the necessary extension framework provided by Apple.

Nordstrom was among the first in the retail community to seize the new opportunity, recently launching an update to its mobile app that allows shoppers to search and share products directly from iMessage.

Coach and Marriott are also leading the pack with the release of their own respective iMessage apps.

Facilitate collaborative holiday shopping lists
Parents playing Santa know how difficult it can be to keep holiday shopping lists in check.

With the new iMessage apps, retailers can help solve a universal consumer challenge ahead of the hectic holiday season.

For example, if you are a retailer or ecommerce marketer, you might consider ways to infuse sharable and collaborative shopping lists via an iMessage app.

Beyond the holidays, iMessage apps can be leveraged for coordinating shopping lists among family members or roommates, or placing group food or coffee orders.

Build the know, like, trust factor
Beyond pragmatic solutions, such as list-sharing, retailers can also expand their creative horizons by exploring ways to align their app experiences with existing consumer behavior.

Fashion brands might note that their audiences heavily rely on friends' endorsements before buying items, or for providing input on various outfit choices.

If this is the case, retailers can build iMessage apps that allow friends to "Like" selections within a group, add their own style picks, and purchase items from directly within the conversation.

Aligning with this existing behavior can help naturally spread your app usage among like-minded groups of consumers. This will drive increased downloads among new audiences and increased usage among existing users.

As an added benefit, retailers can collect more data around how consumers are engaging with their mobile apps.

APPLE'S MOVE to enhance the iMessage ecosystem addresses two key challenges.

The first, on the consumer side, is the fragmentation of mobile activities across various apps: Why leave your conversation to perform an activity related to your conversation in another app?

By streamlining this behavior within a single environment, Apple is taking a swipe at social chat platforms that are in direct competition with iMessage app usage.

The second challenge, on the app creator side, is that it can be difficult to cross-pollinate app usage via word of mouth.

Historically, apps have been closed experiences that are only shared with friends through clunky text message invites (e.g. "I'm using App XYZ join me!").

With this latest update, retailers can provide consumers with more practical use-cases for their apps and socialize their usage organically and among friends.

As marketers seek ways to enhance not disrupt existing consumer behavior, retailers will, in turn, need to explore ways to infuse their mobile experiences with the new potential of the iMessage platform.

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