

COLUMNS

3 different ways to experiment with mobile

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There is no question that mobile is hot: in fact, 20 percent of people ages 18 to 34 only use mobile channels to search for information, complete purchases and check email and are not using desktops or other platforms, according to comScore.

Brands already have an arsenal of mobile tools to interact with customers, from SMS notifications to native applications. The real trick to capturing and keeping customers on mobile is to stay three steps ahead and evolve with consumers.

No ifs and buts

But how can brands innovate without risking losing customers, revenue or time on projects that do not go anywhere?

Experimentation is the answer.

Experimentation allows brands to ask what-if questions and try new things without fear of failure.

Consumers might, for instance, prefer to receive push notifications about new offers but like reading tips and tricks to use products in the native brand app.

The only way to truly know how customers interact with your brand is to experiment, gather data and analyze the impact.

Here are three different ways to experiment with mobile:

1. Try different branded app features that bridge in-store and digital

A Google study found that 82 percent of shoppers say they consult their phones about in-store purchases.

Yet the app store is a crowded space with more than 2 million apps. If you want customers to find and use your app in store, focus on creating a distinct, personalized experience.

Take a cue from The Home Depot.

When Home Depot learned that customers had trouble finding products in the store, the home goods retailer created an app to direct customers to a specific aisle and check product inventory.

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Shoppers can also scan a bar code for more information about a product or see what a product would look like in their home with the augmented reality feature.

Based on the increase in customer engagement, Home Depot called the app experiment a huge success for bridging the gap between in-store and digital.

As a starting place for your branded app, ask what would enhance customers' in-store shopping experience.

If there are never enough store associates to answer customers' questions, consider a virtual shopping assistant feature.

If your brand sells higher-investment items, customers will likely want to evaluate other products before purchasing, so try a product comparison feature.

2. Use mobile wallets to your advantage

The buzz about mobile wallets is everywhere, and "mobile wallet" does not have to be synonymous with finance or payments: Starbucks, Target and CVS have integrated payments into their apps, while travelers use United Airlines and American Airlines boarding passes, for example, in Apple Passbook for United and American flights.

While brands iron out the details of how exactly to create successful mobile wallet passes, there is no doubt that the appetite is high: 54 percent of consumers have used a mobile wallet.

Because mobile wallets come pre-installed on iPhones and Android, it is a valuable platform on which to build.

Experiment with lightweight mobile wallet passes by sending customers timely reminders about coupons about to expire, location-based messages and real-time updates.

For instance, political publication Politico introduced a mobile wallets feature to provide updates about the Brexit vote in June as the polls poured in. It sent users targeted push notifications with breaking news updates, leading to 10,000 users downloading Politico wallet passes. Web site traffic for the online publication also increased 300 percent.

Meet customers where they are and try something new create mobile wallet passes to turn transactions into engaging experiences.

3. Embrace robots for a more human customer support experience

Consumers crave and expect personalized, one-on-one interactions.

Whether customers are inquiring about the status of their order or asking for gift recommendations, brands must rise to the occasion.

Introducing a Facebook Messenger or Kik chatbot is an easy way to engage with consumers on a platform they already use.

For example, Sephora's Kik chatbot shares makeup application tips after customers complete a beauty quiz, H&M's bot helps customers pair a new outfit with jewelry, and DSW's Facebook Messenger bot provides package tracking and gift recommendations.

To leverage a lightweight experiment and meet customers on their favorite platforms, test different ways to integrate chatbots in your customer service.

Start small at first, by talking to the customer support team to identify the complaints and troubleshooting issues that customers report most often and experiment from there.

WHEN YOUR TEAM asks what-if questions and puts bold ideas into action, you will see mobile experiments turn into new sources of revenue and ignite the team to think big.

Make it a goal to brainstorm mobile experiments in your next team meeting, and see where the ideas take you.

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