

COLUMNS

Which mobile channels should brands support?

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By [David Eads](#)

Most organizations struggle with deciding which mobile channels to support.

There are costs and trade-offs with each of the channels. Yet it is important to reach all your customers and do it through the medium that they prefer.

The best approach of course is to support all the channels.

However, there are reasons to build business cases around independent channel costs.

Many companies prefer to roll out channels independently, so they limit risk, measure the impact of adding a new channel, and provide a steady stream of marketing events. Understanding the impact of each channel on your business helps you prioritize and understand the costs of inaction.

Therefore, here is an approach for making decisions by mobile channel:

Mobile Web

Mobile Web has the broadest reach and the most users. However, it has the most limited user interface.

Even with HTML5, browsers are unlikely to fully replicate the user experience of native applications. Browsers will never have full access to native technology either.

For example, if a new phone offers new, compelling hardware not included in the HTML5 spec, native applications offer the only way to use that device until HTML5 can catch up. By then it may be too late.

So, advanced functionality will remain a challenge for browser-based applications and most companies will see the need to offer native applications.

Mobile Web typically accounts for 50 percent of visits for companies that support mobile Web and a number of native applications.

Mobile Web sessions often are often shorter and less likely to transact.

So, while mobile Web will likely be your largest single channel, mobile Web users will be the least engaged and less profitable. Furthermore, by only offering mobile Web, you are missing about half the addressable market.

iPhone

It is no secret that iPhone users are active and passionate about apps.

iPhone native application users have deep visits and are the most likely to transact by far.

In fact iPhone user conversion rates often are 30 percent higher than other channels.

However, all your customers do not have iPhones.

Mobile Web accounts for about half of all sessions and the iPhone typically accounts for about 35 percent of usage when mobile Web and a number of native application channels are offered.

Android

In many markets Android has the largest smartphone market share.

Android users tend to have deep, highly engaged sessions like iPhone users, but they are less likely to transact.

Android conversion rates are similar to mobile Web conversion rates and well behind iPhone.

Despite currently having the smartphone market share lead, Android usually is well behind the mobile Web in absolute visits but traffic is growing quickly.

BlackBerry

Once the definition of a smartphone, Research In Motion's BlackBerry products are losing market share predominantly to Android.

BlackBerry users account for one in five native application sessions, but exhibit a much lower conversion rate.

However, BlackBerry still has significant market share and its late-adopter users could grow or show up with new phones.

BlackBerry is also quite difficult to support when doing native development without a software partner. BlackBerry devices have about six different product families and development is notoriously difficult.

Windows Phone 7

Windows is currently a small portion of application sessions, but is poised to grow very quickly.

Nokia has announced that it will use Windows on phones in the future and there are a number of handset manufacturers and carriers interested in Windows phones.

The user experience is similar to iPhone and Android, so we anticipate usage similar to Android.

Feature phones

Feature phones are the old-fashioned phones typically without a full keyboard.

Feature phones still represent the vast majority of phones in many markets and they still hold a slight majority for now in the developed world.

Feature phone support is critical for applications that require security and must reach the less affluent or less sophisticated masses. This is particularly important in Latin America, India, China and similar developing markets.

Tablets

Tablets are becoming the new must-have channel.

Time spent with applications on tablets is about four times longer than with smartphones.

Tablets are ideal for shopping, multimedia, researching and other deeply engaged tasks. While tablets can generally use traditional Web sites, the experience, loyalty and engagement are enhanced with a tablet application.

Tablets come in with a variety of sizes and operating systems.

Supporting a broad range of tablets will be as difficult or hard than supporting all the smartphones. The Apple iPad currently has a dominant position, but fragmentation is likely to spread as more tablets hit the market.

Summary

Supporting as many mobile devices as possible is critical to reach all your customers.

But it is a challenge to develop for all the channels. Keeping product features synchronized across various channels is also challenging. Managing patches and security fixes becomes an even larger challenge.

Lastly, new mobile devices sometimes seem to appear out of nowhere and force you to place a bet on the

Easy, new mobile devices sometimes seem to appear out of nowhere and force you to place a bet on the importance of supporting that device.

Hot new mobile channels may disrupt your mobile product development timeline and waste money if they are a fad. But missing a hot mobile device may let your competition leapfrog you and damage your business.

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