

COLUMNS

What you don't know about mobile marketing will kill you

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By **Robert Carroll**

Face it: in the world of mobile marketing we are all pioneers. And all pioneers face the same eventual outcomes either heralded as geniuses or forgotten as nameless roadkill on the rutted road to irrelevancy.

So how can we increase the chances of genius and separate the mobile hype from the very real need to engage our current and potential customers wherever and whenever they choose? Here is what you need to know.

It is not all about the app

In an August 2010 report, Forrester Research summed up the rosy view, noting that "mobile apps are the sign of a with-it company."

The simple reason being that having an app represented a branding opportunity that stamped early adopters as innovative companies.

But an app that does nothing more than deliver ads or push wares is unlikely to be warmly received.

Apps that require a user to surrender a great deal of personal information upfront or an unconditional opt-in to your entire annual marketing plan are more likely to incite "brand rage" than to drive sales.

Research by Launchismo among savvy smartphone users consumers with 10-20 apps currently active indicates that to be perceived as valuable, an app should bring together at least two useful services for example, movie ticket sales and user reviews, geo-location and nearby restaurant listings.

If the app has no perceived value for the user, it is history.

Text cannot be marginalized

Not only does texting have deep roots in friend-to-friend communication, it has much stricter rules governing its use than email does, lowering the level of innate resistance to messages received through the medium.

Mobile users have long since wired texting into their behavioral patterns. You get the alert. You read the text. You respond because you want to.

Not only do text messages have an extraordinary open rate, evidence suggests the response rate also exceeds the performance of other marketing channels.

When used to make real-time, on-the-spot offers, texting has repeatedly yielded a better than 10 percent response.

As long as the offers made via SMS are perceived to be of real value to the recipient, the relationship of trust between consumer and brand only deepens with each exchange.

According to a 2010 research report from the Mobile Marketing Association, mobile advertising, too, vastly outperforms outreach in any other medium:

45 percent of consumers notice mobile advertising

Of these, 29 percent respond to mobile advertising

Of these, 39 percent make a purchase

Technology is just a supporting player in the mobile game

The mobile revolution is less about underlying technology than how technology promises to change the nature of human interactions.

Mobile engagement is less about mobile marketing than it is about offering a relevant engagement across all channels.

Do not forget that mobile is not a single channel. It is the intersection of several channels: Web, SMS, email, geo-marketing, localization, "lingual-ization" and true personalization and targeting.

Underlying technology will change as surely as the seasons do.

It is the value-add multichannel efforts and the resulting relationships you forge with customers that will ensure the health and longevity of your brand.

Your goal is the same as it has always been since the dawn of modern marketing: turn prospects into lifetime customers.

You heard that right.

The key conversion is no longer turning a "visitor" into a "customer."

Today's mobile marketer must aim to convert a "prospect" into a "lifetime customer."

The word lifetime changes the nature of the brand interaction, from one that is transaction-driven to one that is about a relationship formed across a broad spectrum of touches and interactions.

A good relationship between brand and consumer will be the product of multiple transactions over time.

Return on Engagement replaces Return on Investment as the key performance indicator that defines success.

Everybody needs to be on board

All companies have challenges integrating initiatives across the entire organization.

But in this digital world, integration is more important than ever.

The company with the best idea may not be the one that wins if someone else can actually work together, across departments, to initiate and nurture these valuable lifelong engagements.

According to analyst Thomas Husson, "45 percent of our 2010 survey respondents with a mobile strategy in place admit to having a shared mobile strategy across the organization."

This means assuring a positive experience every place your customer and your company touch each other ease of sale to ease of use, good documentation to good support, an easy upgrade path all the behavior that in a commercial relationship signal respect. And in the mobile world, respect is tantamount to trust. And trust is tantamount to dollars.

The bonus for a big, integrated "Kumbaya" for the corporation is that it puts you, Mr./Ms. Marketer, in the driver's seat.

Your tenuous "discretionary-spending" job function has now become the lifeblood of the company. Play your cards right, and you become indispensable to the very success of your enterprise.

With great power comes great responsibility

Because users feel more in control of the mobile medium, they appear to be much more likely to trust the communications that reach them.

Consumers are interacting with your company and your marketing through the same medium that they associate with maintaining relationships with friends and family.

Consequently, consumers are much more likely to perceive your brand as a friendly ally.

But if you cross them or cheat them or misrepresent yourself at such a personal touch point, you will subject yourself to the same pain and animosity expressed by a jilted lover.

This may sound funny, but it is no joke. The very equity of your brand is at stake not to mention the viability of your job.

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