

COLUMNS

## Capturing the back-to-school mobile shopper

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By **Patrick Collins**

Your children may be telling you, "Hurray, school's out!" But your retailer is waking up this morning with nothing but back-to-school on their mind.

Somewhere around half of all homes in the United States will have a child returning to school in September and, on average, will spend more than \$400 in apparel, backpacks and electronics generating a \$50 billion shot in the arm for the economy.

Almost half of that spend will be in apparel, outfitting growing and/or fashion-conscious youth in new threads for the fall semester.

And while online continues to grow as a source for parents to stretch their back-to-school dollars, retailers' physical stores will still see a nearly \$10 billion bump between now and Sept. 1.

As retailers put the finishing touches on their back-to-school promotions, including a few key mobile marketing tactics could be the difference between advancing to the head of the class or being held back for a little remedial work.

Here are two breakthrough mobile programs that should be on every retailer's back-to-school marketing plan.

1. Own the price comparison. Look around your store about 70 percent of the people strolling the aisles have their phone in their hand or ready to go in their pocket.

If your product has a price point higher than \$25 and is available through a broad set of retailers for example, shoes and consumer electronics then more than 50 percent of consumers are going to compare prices before completing a purchase.

Someone is going to own that price comparison moment. It might be Amazon, it might be CNet, it might be Footlocker, but it should be you.

The retailer that enables price comparison within its store guarantees a presence as the consumer moves further down the purchase funnel.

At the moment the consumer finds that Amazon offers the same calculator as the retailer whose store she is standing in, there arises a critical moment in the store's opportunity to land that business.

If PriceGrabber.com provided the price comparison, the retailer may never know the exact moment they lost the business.

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If the retailer facilitated the price comparison through the mobile phone, then they have a crucial moment where they know, first, exactly what the consumer wants and, next, the gap between their in-store price and the competitive price.

The retailer then has the opportunity and engagement to try to land the sale through any combination of price, convenience and packaging.

The mobile phone provides a channel through which retailers can claw back some of their lost power to the consumer.

Hold onto the exiting customer.

A recent NRF study found that nearly two-thirds of back-to-school shoppers would be "looking for deals and sales" to stretch their dollars. Every retailer knows upwards of 80 percent of their shoppers leave without buying, and the store has limited opportunity to re-engage that lost customer.

2. Imagine that customers were able to set price alerts for every product in your store, and would be notified of price changes. Now, instead of just leaving the store without buying a certain pair of shoes, the consumer has messaged the retailer about specific product interest and some aspect of price sensitivity.

What could a retailer do with the understanding that 3,500 consumers like the new Air Griffey's enough to pick them up and request a price alert?

This year's back-to-school retail spend should be bigger than each of the previous two years, and retailers that take existing mobile behavior and craft a participatory role will find themselves with increased opportunities to surface consumer intent, and deliver targeted messaging to highly qualified prospects through a mobile device.

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