

COLUMNS

Why QR codes and mobile apps fail

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Too often brands and marketers are quietly chanting troubling, false mantras targeted at two particularly powerful elements from the mobile marketing tool chest.

In fact, it may be happening just down the hall from you right now as you read this piece.

While all mobile bravado on the outside, peeling back the curtain reveals that many of those same would-be fierce marketers and advertisers even progressive enough to test QR tags are actually whispering: "QR tags don't really work 'cause consumers just don't use them."

And when it comes to mobile applications, others whisper: "No one is really using the app we've built, and they are too complicated to develop anyway given all the different handsets and parameters, but we need to have one."

Truly?

Decoding

In fact, this perspective from modern professionals is absolutely fascinating because it seems that the technology itself and/or consumer is actually bearing the brunt of the lack of success in certain mobile campaigns rather than the actual strategy or lack thereof of deployment and the internal corporate culture from which the mobile tools are being initiated in the first place. And this is the very heart of the matter.

Thus, at this point in mobile development, it is vital to begin to drill down into the real issues behind lack of success in mobile and correct them, especially for those executives considering using these tools to reach the valuable younger, hipper demo as well as the out-indexing multicultural audiences, both of which are tethered strongly to mobile devices and, therefore, prime for mobile campaign incorporation.

Make the mistake of either misusing or dismissing such tools as QR tags and mobile apps within where appropriate the overall marketing strategy and a company, quite simply misses potential sales and visibility.

The key is to actually break through the myths and whispers, move beyond just the sexy allure of mobile technology and begin actually applying the platforms with a more thorough understanding of sociological behavior which drives usage and, of course, combine that knowledge with the use of more efficient ROI metrics.

First, the QR code.

For those who may not yet be familiar, this slightly maze-like or alien-looking pattern within a square shape is the item in question and one which is beginning to be used by more brands. Mostly, incorrectly.

The concept is simple: to basically use the code as a doorway-of-sorts into a rich-media brand-related experience, including video, text and SMS opt-in, to create deeper engagement and sales leads. Typically, it can only be

accessed, though, by first downloading an app.

Downloading is hardly a problem for today's young master of mobile, but it is quite rare to see any type of instruction, discussion, teaser or anything remotely related to driving awareness about the tag/code via social media or any other marketing element prior to or when encountering the code.

There is no indication of the sociological experience forthcoming or any of its allure.

Historically, when confronted with something new, human beings need a certain level of information to actually make an engagement decision. Essentially, this is missing, and these items exist in silos, suffering from severe lack of promotional strategy, so it is no wonder why so few marketers believe the codes "work."

In addition, there is little or no build-up to the release of one, little or no incentive or information on what the value is should one take the time to download it and often times little value/reward within a sea of inorganic content once within the code.

And even where some of these elements are happening, there is certainly room for growth.

There is nothing wrong with the tags, the issue is how they are being used, for the most part.

Get it right and there could just be gold at the end of the rainbow because statistics show that 62 percent of people who engage with QR codes do in fact go on to engage with other codes.

Thus, what brands have is an element to create engagement in a consumer's pocket, but it will only be achieved by overcoming temerity, developing strong, 360-degree promotional strategies and gathering true experiential understanding of the brand's target audience before embarking on further mobile adventure.

App trap

Similarly with mobile applications, too often teams seem to be relying mistakenly on an app store to actually handle the bulk of the actual promotion a clear mistake given the sheer number of applications and scope of the marketplaces themselves.

Frequently, genuine consumer behavior and interest is also disregarded.

Not every brand is appropriate for its own full app and often times could much better connect with audiences by building out and offering an app which speaks to the larger lifestyle to which the brand is an integral part, for example.

Generating greater consumer value within the app is key to retain attention.

Also, in determining ROI, there does not seem to be enough appropriate analytics used to determine success, let alone having defined the parameters for success at the outset before declaring the failure.

Even simple elements such as tracking tokens can provide a wealth of information to better define, measure and test.

These are just a few of the reasons why a brand's app may not "working."

THERE IS NOTHING wrong with the technology behind apps or consumers themselves.

Part of the main issue is the promotional approach, lack of 360-degree integration and often times inorganic or just plain boring content and games that even the brand employees themselves would not engage in if they were not paid to do so.

In the near future, the industry will begin to see the vital usage of more strategy experts with true behavioral understanding and real-time creativity to help create successful projects.

Young consumers, particularly those of color, are ready and willing for the next hot experience across mobile.

These consumers are simply not consistently promoted to and engaged with in an appropriate manner by most brands, but the situation can easily be changed.

Mobile is only getting bigger, more elements are being created and the consumer is glued to the device.

Those businesses which get the basics right now and yes, we still are in the basics phase when even the above has not been yet properly used will be in the fast-lane in the quarters to come.

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