

COLUMNS

Driving cross-channel business value with mobile

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Readers of this publication are well aware that mobile commerce is one of the most discussed disciplines in commerce.

However, what passes for mobile commerce today often amounts to little more than a simple iPhone application or a mobile-optimized Web site.

Both of these are building blocks for a greater mobile commerce strategy, but they are just the tip of the iceberg with regards to the potential of the mobile platform.

Mobile complements

When implemented correctly, mobile complements other channels and vice versa.

Yet from a technology perspective, most mobile commerce efforts are currently either standalone or technology that is added on to existing ecommerce platforms.

The trouble is, mobile commerce is limited as a standalone function and can actually be counterproductive if it is not appropriately integrated into and in sync with other channels.

Consider this: you can have an iPhone application, but if it only shows limited product details and pricing and does not also include a mechanism to drive customers to an online site or retail store where they can ask questions about and/or purchase the product, it may have little impact on your business.

Also, it is of zero benefit to the majority of customers who own non-iPhone platforms, such as BlackBerrys and Android handsets.

So, what can you do to move beyond an iPhone application to drive business value immediately across channels with mobile?

I have talked about mobile bar codes, or QR codes, and their ability to link mobile and in-store efforts and drive transactions in a previous article, so following are some additional examples of ways to maximize the mobile medium for both customer communications and commerce:

In-store shopping applications: A recent study in Germany found that of the 929 smartphone users surveyed, 35.6 percent have used their smartphone during a retail store visit to help inform their purchase decision-making process.

Mobile devices can become "virtual salespeople" by providing applications that enable customers to check product availability both in-store and online and access reliable product information.

Location-based services: Mobile store-locator applications can guide customers to the nearest store, or the nearest store that has a specific product in inventory, and also provide coupons for use in-store, further driving in-store transactions.

Multichannel engagement: Mobile can become the first point of contact with a potential customer, who can then be transferred to a different channel.

For example, a coupon could be used as an incentive to download a mobile app, with the coupon redeemable at the online or retail store.

Mobile is also a great way to provide customer updates.

SMS messages, email or automated phone calls can be used to notify customers of product availability or special promotions, driving them to stores, both online and bricks-and-mortar, and providing them with vouchers to encourage purchases.

Closing the sale: Actual mobile transactions have been slow to evolve, due primarily to security and technical considerations. Most of these issues have now been resolved, making mobile an appropriate channel for capturing customer information and executing transactions.

MOBILE PLATFORM capabilities are rapidly progressing with the continuing proliferation of smartphones, powerful mobile browsers and faster cellular networks.

For this reason, mobile commerce must evolve beyond its current iPhone app phase of development to be most impactful for both businesses and their customers.

This is the time for mobile to be a rich, multifunction commerce platform that drives traffic, conversions and customer satisfaction.

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