

COLUMNS

How to merchandise a mobile store

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By **Judy Jansen**

With the advent of handheld mobile shopping, retailers must investigate an entirely unique approach to on-the-go merchandising.

To sell products from a mobile site, companies need to gain credibility from their target audience, and recognize that the smaller screen is an ever-growing medium of trade.

What clicks

A traditional Web site cannot merely adapt to the small screen of a mobile phone.

The mentality of mobile users is far different from that of shoppers traveling to a store or browsing a Web site. They want fast merchandising with a one-click shopping experience.

A mobile user is not going to navigate between pages or wait for an upload. Therefore, a mobile-optimized site offers the best functionality possible.

In effect, merchandising a mobile site involves keeping only the features that are most used on the company's standard Web site. This consists of showcasing the company's most popular products, or highlighting industry-specific layouts.

Choose the most important product detail elements to surface on the product pages.

For some brands, that may be product images or ratings and reviews. For others, the more important data may be system requirements.

Any extraneous material from a traditional Web page, such as the links often found in the right-hand column, can be removed. If a mobile site contains a reduced amount of content, there will be less loading time and easier navigation.

Because a mobile phone has little screen space, it is vital to create a longer, rather than wider, layout design.

Simply recopying a standard Web site onto a mobile site would make images and text illegible.

The extra step of zooming in is tedious, and the need to navigate a screen in four different directions is altogether

The drawback of scrolling through content, and the need to navigate a screen in four different directions is altogether cumbersome. Instead, using a single column design allows the text and images to be discernable.

Designs on

Along with simplicity, a key to merchandising a mobile commerce store is homogeneity with brand design.

Try to keep the brand's look and feel consistent with other channels. Just because you have a smaller space does not mean you have to abandon design elements altogether.

Uniformity is crucial for recognition, so a basic mobile commerce site should still share qualities akin to store and Web site design.

When selling on a mobile site, understanding the typical phone types that the target audience owns are crucial for sales.

Smartphones currently top the charts of leading phones, such as the iPhone, Android and BlackBerry.

Companies need to differentiate the layout of sites based on different phones.

For example, a smaller link may be sufficient with a phone containing a trackball, but a larger link may be necessary for a user using an index finger.

Todd Cabell, senior manager of ecommerce at Crutchfield Corp., said: "The Crutchfield mobile site detects the user's device and optimizes the user interface. You have to be cognizant of a touch-screen and how it creates a completely different experience than when using a desktop or laptop computer."

Tool box

To merchandise a mobile site, it is also essential to craft a personalized experience for the customer.

Create a shopper profile as a phone user browses the site, or alter what merchandise is shown based on former customer preferences. Display a "related-item suggestions" section after a product is purchased.

The added ability to construct a "Wish List" or "Shopping Cart" will give mobile users a sense of individuation on the site, which is important for customer loyalty.

"We understand how people are shopping based on Web analytics data, which help us see what products people are looking at and buying," Mr. Cabell said.

"We also user test our mobile site to understand first-hand what users are trying to do on the site and where we can improve the experience," he said. "Finally, we employ on-site surveys for customers to comment on their mobile experience."

"While doing an analysis of the Outfit My Car' tool on the mobile site, we uncovered an issue specific to the iPhone's form interface that could cause the user to be pulled out of the vehicle selection process and into a search box. A simple fix of removing the search box from these pages increases the percent of users successfully moving through the selection process."

Another means of company credibility requires omitting pop-up advertisements.

When opening a site invokes a series of invasive messages, customers will be opposed to revisiting that mobile channel again. Therefore, it is imperative to keep mobile sites clean of spam.

On call

Although a mobile site's limited space appears restraining, there are a plethora of mobile phone features that can be advantageous to commerce. Firstly, phones have the ability to make calls.

"Our Contact Us' box is obviously a significant aspect of our mobile site," Mr. Cabell said. "Mobile customers tend to call our advisors more frequently than on the desktop site."

Also, many smartphones currently include GPS-location recognition, which allows companies to direct customers to their nearest stores.

Mobile sites can broadcast coupons or free products based on a customer's proximity to a store.

With GPS devices, phones can even showcase different products based on the customer's location and its climate.

Discounts announced on a mobile site are major sources of advertising, as they encourage shoppers to go in-store

to retrieve their savings.

Finally, merchandising a mobile store involves constantly changing products on-site.

By consistently revamping the site's offerings, you are presenting more potential sales to the customers, which motivate them to continue checking the mobile store.

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