

COLUMNS

Impressions of the holiday mobile season

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By **Jeff Hasen**

Rather than the number of mobile impressions during the holiday season, I am most intrigued by the lasting ones. Mobile was the dominant topic in my house and before you say, "Really?" I'll qualify the statement by saying that those talking it up were 55, 65 and 82 years old.

Smartphones. Tablets. QR codes. Mobile advertisements. Applications. Streaming. They all made it into the conversation.

Mum's the word

Soon after receiving her first iPad, my 82-year-old mother-in-law downloaded an app and music quickly filled a room. She shouted out the ingredients for a holiday dinner, then gleefully taught the rest of us the shortcut of using three fingers to zoom in and out on her tablet.

My 55-year-old sister-in-law who for years had passed off my gadget time as trivial did not let her first smartphone out of her hands, much less her sight.

Sure, she was doing many of the activities we were doing in 2007, but gone were the feature phone, triple-tapping and inability to effectively reach the Internet and all it has to offer. Her 65-year-old husband says that he is next up for a smartphone.

New devices and new experiences. That is my lasting impression of 2011. And I am betting that my house was not unique.

Other holiday happenings that caught my eye.

In bigger numbers, advertisers incorporated mobile into their traditional campaigns.

A television spot for Budweiser urged customers to scan a code to win a trip to the Super Bowl.

A disturbing yet memorable commercial for Great Clips showed a weird-looking guy doing jazzercise during the time he saved by making an appointment via an app.

There was more buzz than biz around the mobile wallet, but the concept did get introduced through substantial marketing campaigns for Citi and LevelUp, which got more publicity than it deserved through a \$10 mobile wallet credit for pizza given to the throngs in New York's Times Square on New Year's Eve.

QR codes continued to be dissed online and on social networks, but they were in the consciousness of more Americans, including my 65-year-old brother-in-law who says he is ready to use them as soon as he trades up to a smartphone.

Bell tolls

Sales results are still being tallied, but it is safe to say that those retailers who succeeded had started early with educational efforts to condition shoppers for the activity.

In addition to its iconic red kettle, The Salvation Army used online and mobile technologies to help support the Red Kettle Campaign.

For the seventh year in a row, The Salvation Army allowed fans to become online bell-ringers by signing up to host an Online Red Kettle at www.onlineredkettle.org.

The program allowed individuals and organizations to host their own "virtual" red kettle on their personal, group or company Web site.

In 2010, Online Red Kettles raised nearly \$2 million as thousands of people asked friends and families to give online. In 2011, the Army hoped to raise \$3 million with improved Facebook functionality and an Online Red Kettle iPhone application.

While the numbers are not in, The Salvation Army and mobile in general likely rang the bell in November and December.

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