

COLUMNS

## Tablets and social to make impact on mobile commerce

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As consumers shift their online browsing and buying behavior away from personal computers and toward mobile devices in particular, tablets their shopping habits are adapting to fit both the benefits and the limitations of the mobile world.

Consumers are also finding new ways to tap into their social networks to glean information about brands to follow and products to buy.

Here are our predictions for the trends that will have the most effect on mobile commerce this year and how you will need to adapt your marketing approaches in response:

**Tablet shopping experience:** No doubt you are still grappling with how to market your brand on smartphones, but 2012 brings the added challenge of creating an easy-to-use brand presence for tablets a different animal altogether.

This year, you need to take a hard look at how your brand and associated Web sites come across on tablets.

For instance, while Web sites for tablet shoppers somewhat resemble standard ecommerce sites, tablets such as the iPad do not support Flash programming so if your site uses Flash, you will have to rethink how to translate this experience into the tablet realm.

In addition, since tablets have no mouse for pointing and clicking, you will need to come up with other ways to zoom in on an image or make information clickable.

**Search and navigation gets tablet treatment:** Compared to smartphones, tablets give consumers more screen real estate for browsing, and that is good for brands: it means images and content display better and are easier to view and read than on a phone screen.

On the other hand, search and navigation presents new challenges on tablets.

Fingertip taps and swipes allow tablet users to maneuver around content, but small text menus, which you often see in lists of refinements, are hard to tap on without clicking on another item by mistake.

The same goes for buttons that are too close together, or pagination numbers in the absence of a mouse, tiny search and navigation features are not easy to select.

This year, pay close attention to the search and navigation that you offer on all screens, and make sure you have accounted for tablet users.

**Tablet shoppers want to buy now:** Shoppers generally uses smartphones to research products before they buy.

When they look at products on tablets, they tend to be ready to make the purchase, so they need to get information quickly and with as few touches and taps as possible.

As more of your customers embrace tablets this year, you will need to incorporate better search and navigation, and showcase items through relevant merchandising to push them over the fence.

Shopping and searching where people "live" online: Consumers spend more time on social networks in fact, 91 percent of mobile Internet use is for socializing.

People do not necessarily want to leave these cozy surroundings for an ecommerce Web site.

In 2012, more brands will realize that they need to provide shopping and searching functionality within these social networks.

This year, consider adding search boxes to your Facebook pages, and allow people to use their Facebook profile as the sign-in for your Web site.

Connecting search to social: In 2012, search results will take into account the likes and dislikes of people in a user's social network.

Consumers continue to put great trust in the opinions of their social connections and, this year, most of their purchases will probably rely heavily on the preferences of others.

Keep an eye out for ways to factor in social connections' likes and dislikes when search results are presented for instance, when people search for products, the top results can be based on how many Facebook or Google+ likes the products have received.

New social networks gain traction: Facebook is the 900-pound gorilla in social networking, but it is not the only game in town.

Pinterest, an "online pinboard," grew its audience from 418,000 visitors in May 2011 to 3.3 million by October, according to comScore.

Indeed, Pinterest lets online retailers add "Pin It" buttons to their product pages, driving up yet more social awareness of e-commerce offerings.

Brands can help Pinterest users add products to their "boards," and then allow friends to purchase online.

Pinterest launched an iPhone application in 2011 and has a mobile site, so you can expect more mobile consumers to discover the network.

THESE TRENDS are no doubt just the tip of the iceberg in terms of how marketing will continue to adapt to the mobile world in 2012.

Tablets and social commerce are dramatically changing the way that people consume content and shop for products and they are driving marketers to create new ways for Web site visitors to connect to brands, no matter where they are and what they are doing online.

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