

COLUMNS

Every push is marketing, whether you think so or not

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By [Alan Jones](#)

It has been a decade since I was a Virgin Mobile customer, but I can still remember the sexy, cheeky voice that greeted me when I dialed in to check my voicemails.

Telling you to press 3 to hear your new voicemail messages is potentially a very dry, functional subject, and every mobile carrier I had tried before Virgin treated it as a very dry, functional subject too, using recorded messages about as warm and friendly as Hal telling you why he could not open the pod bay doors.

Someone at Virgin Mobile saw this not as a functional message, but as a potential opportunity to reinforce the brand experience, and the sexy, cheeky recording was made. It certainly worked on me.

You did not hear it here first, but it is still true: everything is marketing.

Pushing something

The number of sales staff you have per store, the way your truck drivers behave on the road, how much you pay your CEO and, most definitely, any highly repetitive interaction you have with your customers.

IVR systems, ATM transactions, retail queues and smartphone push notifications: all great opportunities where you have the choice to:

Reinforce your brand and deepen your brand relationship; or

Teach your customers that the brand marketing ended when they became a customer.

Blathering on to anyone who will listen this week and several who will not many marketers with a branded application have told me, "Oh, we don't use push messages for marketing, it's just to let them know [insert dry functional purpose here]."

Argh. They are not getting it. Everything is marketing.

And when you are sending a one-to-one message to a customer, which, no matter how and when you do it, is interrupting something else she was already doing, and the device you are sending it to is the most personal, most likely-to-be-present device she has ever owned, is this not the most valuable marketing opportunity you will ever have? Repeat after me: "Yes!"

Meh, I'll do it later, what's the worst that could happen?

Remember, every push is marketing, even if the creative in the push seems strictly functional when it is written for example, "Your friend ABC just checked-in" it is either communicating something on-brand or off-brand.

Every push message is an opportunity to reinforce or dilute the customer's relationship with the brand, and even functional communication can become a chore and then a bore and then spam and then blocked.

If you are not paying attention to which messages are ignored/opened/acted on, you will not even be able to begin predicting when that might happen.

But we're not spamming them, why would they block us?

Too many marketers consider their own push notifications only in isolation, not thinking about how many other pushes a customer might be getting that same day.

Not all users block the most annoyingly repetitive app they have got installed, many of them just block the one in front of them right now. You do not have to be doing anything wrong to be the app that delivers the last straw.

But I can still reach them, right?

Once push from your app has been blocked, and you are on, say, screen three of six screens of apps, and if you have not had an opportunity to collect an email during registration, you are out of luck.

Which ought to remind you of how it felt to have an app installed off-deck in the bad old days, with some installed users out there, but no way to reach them and build a relationship that will keep them spending time in the app, buying in-app, clicking on ads, buying the next version, or whatever your goals are.

I don't want to be Sir Richard Branson, but I don't want to get blocked

The way to avoid getting blocked out by your own users is to work on targeting your push creative, test what works and learn what does not, find when and why it is best to send a push. It is not hard, but you do not get to do any of that without some push analytics in place.

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