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Business at its best

Back to basics: Lessons learned from the mobile Web

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Since you are reading a publication that also covers mobile marketing, I assume you do not need a long introduction explaining how mobile is the future of marketing. You already know that.

Instead, let us talk about the way that mobile devices are changing every user interface from tablets to digital music services, and more.

Simply put, by moving many of our daily activities and processes to mobile platforms, we are teaching marketers and their developers and designers how we want an interface to work.

Sure, this might seem backwards at first. Since mobile is a relatively new platform, should not the best practices from the 20 years of modern Web site design be informing how we design for mobile? Not so fast.

Although we have clearly established best practices for a sit-down, focused Web site experience, the game has changed.

Yes, some of our interaction with a mobile device may still be during a seated session, but we also use them while standing in a line, waiting at a red light, or even watching our kid's soccer game. And best practice for mobile design should be applied across all platforms. Especially the "traditional" sit down Web site interaction experience. It is time to get back to basics.

To illustrate this point, I would like to share a personal experience.

Mum's the word
My wife is a stay-at-home mom who drives our toddlers to various activities, chases them around the house and barely has any time for anything else.

When she finally has a chance to breathe, her interaction with the world begins through her mobile phone.

With a few simple taps, Facebook provides her what she needsthe ability to quickly and easily catch up with friends, family and maybe even a few brands. All of the content she wants is readily available to her in a simple format.

Yes, she used to log in to Facebook on her computer, but after being bombarded with ads, event notifications, birthday alerts, game requests and even Spotify telling her what music I listen to, she decided she did not need any of the "extras" Facebook offered outside of the mobile platform.

And why should she when it is easier and faster to get exactly what she wants through her mobile device?

It is important to remember that giving someone everything is not always best.

Mobile devices are shaping and helping to create a new set of (old) interface best practice, not just for the small screen, but across all interfaces.

Flash, fly-overs and animation led designers to create some pretty complex interfaces that often gave users more than they needed, or wanted.

Mobile is taking us back to the basics, basics that should be considered for any interface:

Start with the problem, not the solution. By understanding the users' core needs and building the interface to solve only a handful of problems, the best mobile Web sites and apps limit themselves to only a few key tasks.

Begin by writing down everything that you think you want your mobile site or app to accomplish, and then prioritize the top two or three tasks. And do not waver from that list.

Break down complexes processes into manageable chunks. Users engaged with mobile devices usually have less time, tend to multi-task and often have a specific goal in mind.

Couple this with the small screen size and it becomes critical for complex processes to be simplified.

Fortunately for mobile users, mobile Internet technology does not effectively allow for rollovers, fly-out menus, and other navigational tricks that usually drive the computer-based user deep within the experience.

Allow users to get in, out, and on with their lives. Due to the limited time people spend on mobile devices and the concern for bandwidth, a good mobile site or app allows the user to get in and out and on with their lives. So, why does not this apply for all platforms?

As marketers, we like to believe consumers want to spend hours on our site reading pages of invigorating copy, commenting on posts and analyzing every picture. And while this is the case for some users, in reality, many want to perform a simple task and move on.

Other platforms should look to mobile as an example of sticking to the basics. Sure, that image is beautiful, but does it really help the user complete a task? If not, remove it.

AS YOU DESIGN, think of the whole experience and how it applies to multiple channels.

The mobile platform helps us to concentrate on a few core experiences and, by doing so, you are really focusing on a positive user experience for all users.

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