

COLUMNS

Advancing mobile technology transforms retail

October 15, 2010



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Have you ever walked into a large retail store looking for a particular item, say, duct tape, but left empty-handed and frustrated because you could not find a sales associate and did not have time to wander aimlessly? You are not alone.

Eighty-three percent of consumers have trouble finding a desired item in stores, per Bryles Research's national consumer research study in December 2008.

Emerging mobile solutions, including in-store retail navigation, can transform this challenge into an opportunity to drive incremental sales, gain valuable business intelligence, and enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Additional tools, such as digital shopping lists, in-store coupons, instant reviews and price comparisons make shopping easier, faster and more enjoyable.

Sixty-seven percent of customers say they would take advantage of mobile technologies if made available in the stores they shop.

Deploying a major roll out of a mobile shopping solution is not a simple task considering the plethora of devices and platforms on the market today.

Additionally, it is critical to offer a comparable shopping experience for the majority of customers who do not have smartphones.

Untapped opportunity

Retailers, marketers and service providers are at the brink of a massive technological opportunity to evolve the retail experience.

According to The Wall Street Journal, 79 percent of shoppers use Web or mobile phones to get product help and information before actually making an in-store purchase, yet integrated mobile technology is nearly non-existent in the bricks-and-mortar retail world.

Bringing these users real-time information while they are physically in the retail space opens up vast new opportunities for targeted promotions, upselling and an improved customer experience. The potential is limitless.

The Wall Street Journal reports that 24 percent of retailers' revenue is lost due to customers not finding what they came to buy.

To solve this problem, shoppers need to be engaged prior to, during and after the shopping experience. Technological advancements in retail and mobile technologies can provide just that.

By delivering a comprehensive, intelligent and customizable solution, all stakeholders, from the retailer to the service provider, and ultimately to the consumer, can enjoy measurable benefits by embracing these emerging technologies.

As the industry begins to engage with this new world of mobile retail, it is important to consider how the solution can be customized to create an optimal user experience.

Personalization is one of the critical emotional ties to technology and shopping that keeps users coming back time and time again.

Integration with social media can instantly broaden the reach of these mobile initiatives as well.

Loyalty and reward programs encourage consumers to regularly interact with their favorite brands.

Some brands have been very successful by offering badges, cash and other prizes to their most dedicated followers, giving users a compelling reason to follow their product.

In a social setting, users typically have a close and trusted connection with those in their social network, often spreading their opinions, presenting a positive image of the brand to the user's vast network of contacts who are then brought on board.

By leveraging these social experiences and enabling users to share something positive they have enjoyed with a particular retailer or brand, there is an opportunity to build deeper and longer lasting customer relationships.

Social networks, combined with the rapidly increasing mobility of people and technology, make connecting physical technological advances and environments much easier than any of us ever imagined only five years ago.

Unexpected bonus

Mobile technology delivers additional value for retailers and advertisers by providing an unprecedented level of detailed business intelligence information that was previously inaccessible.

Consumer shopping metrics, including insights at point of decision, unique shopper segmentation analytics and a consumer guided footprint across retail segments can be aggregated and delivered to retailers.

Understanding these hyper-targeted shopper metrics allows retailers and brands to connect with consumers outside of the store, while creating a stronger influence to drive sales in the store.

For example, push notifications, emails and text messaging can be combined with more sophisticated shopping applications to reach out to shoppers with precisely timed relevant promotions.

Special offers, shopping loyalty cards and retail point-of-sales systems can now be integrated into digital wallets. The convergence of these technologies can now complete the purchase cycle with digital coupon redemption and tracking. These processes also help protect against coupon fraud concerns by monitoring coupon distribution and redemption activity in real time.

Combining utility with fun while engaging shoppers opens up a vast array of opportunities for retailers to:

Integrate mobile into the physical retail space through location-based information

Tie relevant customer-centric promotional offers to a user's wants and immediate needs

Address real, re-occurring shopper pain points

Create fun and engaging experiences through social gaming and sharing

Generate valuable shopper insights that create better user experiences over time

Allow brands to connect with a consumer in the store at the moment of truth, creating an immediate, positive impact on purchase decisions.

As the mobile retail ecosystem continues to build momentum, many stakeholders are deploying mobile technology to advance the customer experience, increase customer satisfaction and boost profitability.

As you are developing your marketing program and integrating social media and mobility, be sure to consider the variety of new avenues that are available to enhance relationships with your customers through these innovative technologies.

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