COLUMNS

6 tips for improving mobile customer experience

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According to a recent survey from IDC and Appcelerator, an impressive 93 percent of mobile developers anticipate that most retail companies will have mobile commerce strategies this year. And it is easy to see why.

Gartner predicts that 2013 will be the year that mobile devices overtake PCs as the most common Web access device worldwide. Knowing that it is very likely that a mobile device will be used at some point in the customer's journey, what can marketers do to prepare for the mobile shift?

The truth is there are many different ways for businesses to go mobile. And while this may be good news for some organizations, others may be confused by the number of options available.

In addition, some tactics, such as producing a native application or optimizing a Web site for the mobile screen, may work better for one organization but not for another.

To help determine which mobile strategy is the best fit, I suggest considering the following six key points:

1. Take a task-oriented approach
All organizations should consider a task-oriented approach to viewing their Web site.

Not only is this a best practice, but mobile customers are typically even more task-focused than someone using their PC due to lower bandwidth and the limitations of the small screen.

Businesses should also have an understanding of why their customers are using their mobile device.

Are they using their phones while shopping in your store? Are they on the street looking for your nearest shop? Or are they at home on their tablet while watching your commercial on television?

As you can see, defining the task is critical as it enables you to decide what content you need to optimize and what e-services you need to mobilize.

2. Determine the frequency of the task
Once you have understood what tasks your customers are looking to perform with your mobile offerings, you should then consider the frequency of the task to help decide if developing a native app is worth the investment.

For example, will your customers be using your app every day for tasks, such as checking account balances? Or will they only need the app occasionally for tasks such as finding the nearest ATM?

The goal here is to avoid the expensive exercise of building an app to do something basic that can be achieved on a mobile Web site.

3. Consider how mobile device features fit into your task

One of the advantages that a native app offers is that it can access a mobile device's existing functionality such as the camera or GPS to fulfill certain tasks. This makes it perfect for infrequent tasks, such as submitting a car accident insurance claim.

The app can take photographs of the car, the GPS can report the location, and a unique interface allows the user to draw vehicle positions and indicate damage.

These functions considerably increase a customer's ability to successfully perform a task while adding real-time business value for your organization.

4. Do not forget about interactive experiences
Another point to consider is that mobile devices often have capabilities to effectively render creative content, such as a game or other interactive experiences, for customer engagement.

Recent advances in HTML5 have provided developers with plenty of options for rendering interactive mobile Web applications.

With the mobile Web making this capability much easier to achieve, developing an app with interactive features is absolutely within reach when it is appropriate.

5. Android or iPhone?
One of the limiting factors when developing a native app is that they are designed specifically for one type of device to best leverage the native functionality inherent in that phone.

So an app developed for Apple's iPhone will not work on Google Android phones and vice versa.

In addition, each app marketplace also has differing design considerations, deployment options and policies.

This can be a challenge to navigate, so it is important to understand which devices your customers are using to help prioritize your deployment plans.

Web analytics reports are an excellent tool to help understand which devices your customers are using to complete their online tasks so you can develop the right native app for the right platform.

6. Do not forget about the cross-channel experience
Ultimately, your audience will engage with your brand with whichever channel is easiest for them to use and most immediately at hand, whether it is your mobile app, corporate Web site or call center.

For this reason, it is important to consider that your customer's impression of your organization will be formed as he or she crosses between these channels.

For example, think about how your marketing campaign emails appear on your customer's mobile device versus on their PC.

Also, when your mobile user clicks on the call-to-action button in the email, does it bring her to your Webpage or will it launch an app that uses the phone's GPS to direct her to your nearest store?

A content delivery tier can help optimize this cross-channel experience, helping you adapt to the context of the user, the task she is trying to complete or the data you know about her already.

ONE SURE WAY to succeed with your mobile strategy is by making mobile engagement easy for your customers.

Organizations should step back and think about why mobile users are making the effort to engage with them on the small screen.

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