

COLUMNS

Heat wave to holidays: How to prep now for Q4 mobile success

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It is not quite the middle of September, and in most parts of the country, the temperature has not yet dropped below 80. So, you would be forgiven if thoughts of sugarplums are not dancing in your head. And yet, if you look ahead to the winter holidays now, you will have gifts aplenty in the form of customers' attention and spending.

Preparing for mobile success can seem daunting to even the most sophisticated marketers, but this holiday season will present an onslaught of opportunities for which there is still time to capitalize.

From the rumored releases by Apple, Samsung and Google of a multitude of smartphone, tablet and phablet devices, the 2013 holiday season promises to be a busy one for early and late adopters alike.

With an improving economy and, more importantly, rising consumer confidence, you can be sure that there will be a lot of newly activated mobile devices on Dec. 26 and beyond.

Are you prepared, or, at least preparing, for owners of new iPhones and Galaxy devices looking to outfit their new toys with the best applications and surfing their favorite sites? If you have not shifted from heat wave to winter wonderland yet, here is a guide to create mobile success during the upcoming holiday season:

Avoid analysis paralysis

The fact is that while Year 1 of mobile has passed, there remains friction and disparity in mobile measurement and attribution standards. It is a fractured environment, similar to the early days of Web marketing. Do not let mobile's infancy in tracking and attribution hold you back.

Trust your intuition for now. Your personal usage, as well as observation of people around you, confirms that mobile is an important medium, and works for both branding and direct response goals. Data understanding is vital, and should drive our decisions, but yet we should not be imprisoned by it.

You would not attribute 100 percent of credit to the neon Budweiser sign for driving that beer purchase because it was the last thing the customer saw before he belied up to the bar.

In the same manner, do not stay on the sidelines in mobile just because you do not have all the numbers you are used to getting in the digital marketing space. Data measurement and mobile analysis capabilities are improving daily, so get going and do not continue to fall behind.

No debate: Mobile Web first, then app

Let us face it the C-suite likes apps. It is discrete, and easy to show off.

Consumers, though, continually tell us that a mobile-optimized site is their preferred method of accessing your

wares, services and the like.

An easy-to-use mobile Web experience will both help you acquire new customers as well as retain existing customers.

An app is terrific for retention, but you are not likely to get a lot of downloads from people who are not already loyalists of some type.

Thus, your biggest long-term return potential comes from a site built with the mobile medium in mind and with responsive design.

Your mobile site should not be a shrunken version of your full Web experience. Context matters. So, think about why people would visit m.yourbrand.com when they are on the go, during commercial breaks or at the doctor's office

Speaking of responsive design look in your analytics to understand what your lead device should be. Are you more likely to be viewed on a smartphone or tablet? Use the data you have and if you do not have it, conduct some simple surveys to drive your development.

Your mobile customers they may just surprise you

If you have been focused solely on the Web experience, you need to start with an open mind when it comes to understanding your mobile visitors.

While all demographic segments are showing growth in mobile adoption, many marketers come to find significant differences in their mobile customers' psychographic segments, including aptitude, attitude and activities.

Preferred devices, desired features and functionality, usage patterns, duration of purchase consideration these are only a handful of data points to collect to drive development of your mobile site.

It is so obviously true that it often goes unsaid, but your mobile site should never be your Web site squeezed into a small screen. If that is part of your strategy, you might as well polish your resume now.

Wax on, wax off

We live in an iterative space. Google did not get its revenue model right the first time around. Fab.com was failing as a social network for the gay community when it made its pivot it is now valued at more than \$1 billion.

Accept the fact that you will not achieve perfection from the get-go. Get the mobile product out in the wild, and commit to fast and agile iterations.

The reason for moving quickly is that mobile device ownership is exploding so quickly that some industry experts predict it will be the top medium for accessing the Internet as early as 2014.

First does not always mean best, but it does mean you have great odds. You cannot get better until you establish benchmarks.

Launch your alpha or beta version as quickly as you can so that when the holidays hit, you are closer to omega, though, let us be real there will always be something we want to update or enhance.

Once you have built it, they will come after you advertise

With a mobile-optimized site, you can rest assured that any dollars spent in acquiring traffic will not be a total waste.

Mobile advertising is a dynamic space, with methods and options changing daily reminiscent to the early stages of the Web.

If you can rule out "the site sucks" as a possible culprit to non-performing mobile campaigns, you are light years ahead of many marketers, including your competitors.

Having that assurance will allow your team to work with the publishers to optimize, and to have confidence in their decisions to either scale up or cut back.

Tie it up as best as you can

As mentioned before, mobile attribution is difficult today.

The inability to cookie users in the same way you can on the Web presents challenges. There are ways, however, to optimize how you handle the data.

My recommendation is to set things up so you have an end-to-end view of your customers regardless of how they engage with your brand and no matter the device they use in those interactions.

Do you allow customers to create accounts? If so, encourage them to log in and make it easy for them to stay logged in on your mobile and Web sites.

Use filters in your analytics to understand the full customer journey, and segment based on phases of the funnel.

There are many sellers of mobile ads and services that purport to work this magic for you. Much of it is hyperbole, unfortunately, but there are those that are legitimately on the path for the Holy Grail of cross-device attribution.

Much like with your mobile Web development, get started, and iterate. Mobile measurement is far from being perfect, but there are gains to be had if you think holistically.

Do not feel daunted if you missed being a first mover in the mobile space, know that you are not alone.

The opportunity to establish mobile as a significant revenue contributor remains ripe. Do not wait any longer though the tipping point has been reached.

The guidelines above should set you on the right path. Now, make sure you get on Santa's nice list, and hopefully this time next year, we will be able to cite your company as a case study for how to drive mobile profits.

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