

COLUMNS

How marketers can understand and maximize mobile data

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By AN AMERICAN MARKETER COLUMNIST

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Today's mobile devices are like miniature computers with powerful functionality and connectivity. In fact, Forrester Research has taken to calling smartphones "perennially connected devices." And like our computers, our mobile devices also generate enormous amounts of data about our interests, intents and interactions. With approximately two-thirds of the U.S. population now owning a smartphone, that is a lot of data.

Mobile data can be a fountain of consumer insight, but not all marketers are taking full advantage of the opportunity. It is possible that many marketers simply do not know what they have at their fingertips, and do not understand the kind of information that can be gleaned from mobile data sources. But whatever the reason, marketers need to get on board, because mobile is here to stay.

Tagging along

To address how marketers can maximize the utility of mobile data, it is important to understand the two key sources for mobile data: tags in applications and mobile Web sites, and panels.

Apps account for 70-plus percent of mobile device usage, meaning the bulk of behavioral data can be gathered from them.

Tags tiny pieces of code embedded within the apps record and send information about how, when and where consumers are using the apps on their mobile devices. For instance, how often do you use your mobile Facebook app? How long do you play Candy Crush? Do you ever click on the interstitial ads in your games?

Mobile Web sites make up a smaller percentage of smartphone usage, but they account for nearly 20 percent of all Internet browsing, according to comScore. That is one in five page views happening on mobile. Marketers should pay attention.

Mobile Web sites actually deliver data similar to standard Web site analytics: which browser visited, how long they stayed or if they made a purchase. Such information is also reported via Web site tags.

The other major mobile data source is the panel, which you may recognize as a classic research tool.

Major market research firms such as Flurry, comScore and Nielsen set up these panels and regularly reach out to them with survey questions about their demographics, perceptions and behavior with regard to mobile.

In some cases, software is installed on panel members' mobile devices to track that information and send it back to

the research firm. Other times, panelists just answer questions about their mobile phone use.

These market research firms actually provide a great deal of macro-level insight that not only educates the industry and drives innovation, but which can also help inform your decisions about mobile.

The drill

On a more granular level, in-house IT and analytics teams or external mobile marketing partners can help parse all of the data coming in from your apps and mobile sites to measure engagement, performance and ROI, as well as more consumer-specific insights such as needs and interests.

Many brands will also partner directly with research firms for access to their mobile data collection and analytics capabilities.

This data, whether sourced from a behavioral panel, survey panel or page/app tags directly, can help you determine the best ways to engage with your customers, not just on their mobile devices but across channels. This insight can also inform product development, CRM and many other aspects of your business.

For instance, let us say you are a category manager at The Home Depot and your job is to maximize appliance sales. You have always relied upon metrics from bricks-and-mortar stores and the ecommerce Web site, but now you are realizing that consumers are doing a lot of comparison shopping for appliances on mobile devices before they come in to stores or use the Web site.

By tagging your mobile app and your mobile Web site, you can gain a holistic view of what appliances are researched the most, what the most popular brands are and what audience segments are most interested in what appliance brands.

This information enables you to then craft promotional offers designed to drive sales of a particular appliance or brand, based on demonstrated customer interest, and then deliver them via mobile channels.

You can even drill down that data even further to determine information such as whether purchase decisions are made based on features or pricing, or what brands and products are most popular in local markets, and then tailor mobile offers in specific markets to those consumers.

Essentially, by leveraging mobile data, you are gaining access to at least that 20 percent of consumer insight that you were missing before.

To start taking advantage of the opportunities that mobile provides, there are a few things you need to do today.

Big on data

Examine your mobile presence: Do you have a mobile app or Web site? Should you?

Apps are an ideal way to translate high functionality PC Web sites to the mobile platform, but they may not be for every brand. Perhaps creating a mobile Web site will be more useful for your customers and more appropriate for your brand and its offerings.

Determine which platforms can help you deliver the mobile experience your customers want, and what can be done within the scope of your budget and resources, and get it done now.

If you do have a mobile site or app, are you collecting data? You do not build these mobile touch points for their own sake.

Get the most out of them by integrating a data collection and analytics functionality, or partner with a mobile data company that can do the heavy lifting for you.

The insight you need to be successful is there for the taking, so do not just let it sit there unused.

When it comes to partners, consider working with one of the big research and technology firms such as comScore, Nielsen, Adobe or Flurry to tap into the broader technology insight that they can offer. Most of them offer free trial subscriptions so you can get a taste of what they have to offer your business.

Do these things, and do them now.

At this stage of the game, and with so much at stake, you cannot afford to let the mobile data revolution pass you by.

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