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Why brand applications are ads

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Have you ever seen the Effen Vodka application? You shake your iPhone to activate the GPS, and wherever you point the phone, an augmented reality view displays pops up with the nearest bars featuring the vodka. It is amazing.

Not necessarily with respect to the technology which is a cool coalescence of a number of features most of us rely on daily but in the fact that the application is not really an application.

It is an ad masquerading as an application.

It is a highly engaging and interactive commercial, designed to draw you in with its coolness factor.

Now, does it get me personally to drink Effen? Maybe, maybe not. I am personally not a vodka drinker. But I am certainly more aware of the brand than before.

Effen good

The Effen application is free.

What about ones that consumers pay for?

Let us take the Nike + GPS application as an example. It is $1.99, and features ways to enhance your running: routes, challenges and GPS-based mileage. You can upload data and runs to Facebook and the Nike site.

The application is even more interactive than Effen's. And the best part? You paid for the privilege to install and participate in a commercial.

The truth of the matter is that applications are ads, plain and simple.

For sure, some are not Angry Birds, anyone? But the ones with the highest probability of affecting consumer behavior are those created by seasoned multichannel retailers and consumer packaged goods companies.

These entities are fully aware of the need to harness every possible medium to engage consumers, both for retention and acquisition purposes.

The challenge that remains, however, is exactly how one measures advertising's influence.

Measuring spirit

Brand applications from multichannel merchants and consumer packaged goods companies are just getting beyond the experimental stage. They are here to stay, having developed beyond a "nice to have" and into a fundamental part of any marketing strategy.

As a result, they need to be included within a total mobile measurement strategy, but that measurement must extend beyond standard application engagement metrics.

Engagement is immense. But let us be honest: no marketer spends solely to increase brand engagement. They want that advertising spend to ultimately generate a return.

For that reason, application engagement must be analyzed with an eye towards total cross-channel understanding.

Let us take the Nike example again.

A consumer has bought and installed the application on her phone in anticipation of training for a marathon. She begins using it to track mileage and progress. She also begins to experiment with sharing on Nikeplus.com.

And then she begins to see other suggestions in bright colors: outfit your run, find your kicks and train with us.

Soon enough, the consumer finds herself depending on Nike for everything from running advice to equipment.

This is exactly what the application is designed to do: create an experience with the brand and a dependency upon its products.

Nike, however, would not know it had succeeded in its goal unless it was able to track and analyze the consumer's visit and ultimate conversion to the site.

Understanding that entire sequence of behavior is integral to that measurement.

And notice how I never once mentioned clicks.

A marketer must be able to do this from a view-based perspective, as the consumer can engage with the Web site two or three times over a week, and just by typing the URL into her browser. That still very much counts as engagement.

So, plain and simple, applications are ads.

Adds up

Applications are not designed to survive independently, nor should they be viewed as their own thing. Their job is to enhance pleasure with the brand and, in due course, create or preserve loyalty and drive consumer retention and acquisition.

As such, applications analytics must be predicated upon understanding consumer behavior in every step that occurs outside of the application. If not, a marketer's ability to measure its end goal will be severely diminished.

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