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Looking back at 2013: Report card on top mobile predictions

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At the beginning of this year, I wrote a column in *Mobile Marketer* on the Top 10 mobile trends for brands and marketers for 2013. I know, I know the massive post-holidays hangover must have clearly clouded my judgment.

However, if you happen to find yourself in the prediction business even accidentally it is always a good idea to hold yourself to account and see just how right or wrong you actually were.

So, in what can only be described as an exercise of stubborn masochism, below is a retrospective on my 2013 predictions:

1. 2013 will be the year of mobile again

Predictometer: A+

It is a truism, but I think I will still give myself full marks for it. This really was the year of mobile again.

In the United States, average mobile data usage doubled between in 2013. Smartphone usage contianued to climb rapidly with penetration well over 60 percent (eMarketer 74% percent; Nielsen 64 percent; Pew 61 percent). Both Android and Apple had more than 50 billion apps each downloaded from their respective marketplaces.

Was 2013 the year of mobile? You betcha.

2. Marketing budgets for mobile will become mainstream

Predictometer: A

According to eMarketer, mobile ad spending was up 80 percent in 2013, to a total of $16 billion.

An Interactive Advertising Bureau study showed that mobile advertising spend for large businesses increased 142 percent in the past two years, with 32 percent of businesses surveyed maintaining annual mobile budgets of $300,000 or more.

An increasing number of companies are creating dedicated mobile budgets and allocating increasing amounts of money to those budgets.

Nonetheless, the percentage of ad dollars spent on mobile is still significantly less than the percentage of time spent by consumers on mobile, indicating that companies can and should spend a lot more dollars on mobile since that is where the eyeballs are.

3. Shopper marketing will be the mobile area of focus

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Predictometer: C

When I think of mobile shopper marketing in 2013, I am reminded of a line from Macbeth: it was "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Some literate reader is bound to point out that in Shakespeare's play, the phrase above is preceded by the words "It is a tale, told by an idiot " but I chose to ignore that part for obvious reasons.

There was a lot of effort, quite a bit of innovation, some progress but no coherent, mass-adopted solutions yet. Which is a shame.

According to Google, 84 percent of smartphone owners use their devices to help shop while in store. That is just one part of the puzzle.

In actuality, mobile can be used effectively across all parts of the customer lifecycle, from discovery and consideration to decision and retention. It a huge, honking opportunity, but it just was not to be in 2013.

4. Mobile commerce, yes. Mobile payments, no

Predictometer: A

According to eMarketer, mobile commerce is expected to grow 68 percent in 2013 and account for 16 percent of all ecommerce sales.

Business Insider calculated that mobile commerce accounted for nearly $940 million in sales over Thanksgiving weekend. Consumers are clearly putting money where their mouth is when it comes to mobile commerce.

Mobile payments did not really take off in 2013 either just as I had predicted. Apple did not bother to put an NFC chip in its newest iPhone release again.

Google Wallet seemed to lose steam, staff and a whole boatload of money. And ISIS, the long-awaited-and-much-drawn-out payments app developed by AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile, finally launched in November to terrible reviews. Mobile payments in 2013? Nope.

5. The Apple/Android phone duopoly will persist

Predictometer: A

If anything, I should have been more specific and called it the "Apple/Samsung" duopoly.

Collectively, the two companies accounted for 65 percent of smartphones in the United States and 45 percent worldwide.

If you look at Apple and Android together, they account for nearly 94 percent of all smartphones worldwide, up from 87 percent last year.

BlackBerry is on its last gasp and Nokia is officially no more, leaving Microsoft's Windows Phone operating system in a distant, distant third place.

6. Fewer apps. More HTML5 Web sites

Predictometer: C

When I made this prediction I thought the answers were obvious, but now I know they are obviously not. In April, LinkedIn revealed that it, like Facebook last year, had switched from HTML5 to native code for the latest build of its app.

An increasing number of developers are pointing to the lack of sufficient development and debugging tools, an as-yet immature ecosystem and performance considerations as issues in developing HTML5 applications.

Increasingly, engineers are sidestepping the debate and deploying HTML5 or native code on a case-by-case basis, as well as increasingly developing hybrid applications that use both.

On the business side, the app gold rush does seem to have died down finally.

Brands and companies are no longer just demanding apps and are realizing that successful apps require significant time and resources, both in development and marketing.

7. Less designing for the content, more designing for the context

Predictometer: B-

This year, Google announced that non-mobile friendly pages will be penalized in PageRank and followed that up by placing AdWords campaign ads across both mobile and desktop by default.

As a result, it is rare to find a commercial business that does not already have a mobile-friendly Web site already, the massive and completely bizarre exception, of course, being Apple.

Although more accepted, the notion of designing for context is still not widespread.

Designing for context requires a rethink of the user experience as opposed to a straightforward port of the interface from one device to another as one does when making a design responsive. Expect more next year though.

8. More innovation in mobile ad formats

Predictometer: B

There was a fair amount of innovation around monetizing mobile this year.

Facebook and Twitter both blazed the way by generating gobs of money from their new mobile ad formats.

In-app monetization also gained a lot of attention with the success of Candy Crush and others like it. Affiliate networks, in-game advertising, sponsorships, branded takeovers and special versions and a host of other advertising strategies were also experimented with.

Despite all the experimentation and the successes though, it is clear that these are early days and there is still a long, long way to go.

9. MS Tags will disappear. QR codes will survive and thrive

Predictometer: C

I was right that MS Tags would disappear: in August, Microsoft announced that it would officially shut down its Microsoft Tag service in 2015.

But I was wrong about QR codes. While they are definitely going to survive, I do not think they are going to thrive like I thought they might.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that businesses and advertisers are increasingly moving away from using QR codes and consumers are less likely to scan them.

10. More augmented reality and other mobile activation alternatives

Predictometer: B

Augmented reality got a huge boost when IKEA incorporated the technology into its 2014 catalog released this past summer.

The launch of Google Glass also brought attention onto augmented reality.

Although 2013 saw augmented reality come into the mainstream, we are still only just scratching the surface of what is possible.

What did I miss?

No review of predictions review is possible without considering the absolute misses as well.

One of the biggest in my view was about the increasing convergence between social and mobile.

Today, social is mobile and that has enormous ramifications for marketers.

I should probably have also said something about the ongoing device screen-size proliferation and the rise of phablets and their impact on the space.

As Neils Bohr once said, "Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future." And it is a good thing too, because if it were easy, it would be no fun at all.

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