

COLUMNS

5 keys to elevating brands through mobile apps

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The latest statistics reveal that mobile culture is dramatically on the rise.

Global downloads in mobile app stores are forecasted to surpass 21.6 billion by 2013, estimated as being worth over \$29.5 billion in revenue, per Gartner.

While the numbers reveal an immense opportunity for brands, marketers and companies need to carefully consider mobile strategy before jumping into application development, or risk not only poor uptake but damage to a brand's reputation.

To elevate a brand through mobile, firms need to be asking several key questions to ensure that a comprehensive and engaging, rather than a me-too approach, is taken towards application development.

1. Am I closing the loop with mobile Web?

While creating a mobile application may seem like the perfect place to initiate brand integration through mobile, the mobile Web should not be overlooked.

With the reach of WebKit, brands are now able to develop both hybrid native and WebKit applications and mobile Web applications, further adding to the complexity of the mobile medium.

Regardless, your mobile application strategy should consider a cohesive approach to applications and mobile Web working together.

You will find that mobile Web and applications each have their place, and each has its own unique set of merits in meeting the objectives of an overarching mobile marketing strategy.

2. How is the application going to create utility for users?

Familiarizing yourself with your audience and identifying their needs from a content and features perspective is essential in determining the ways your application can be beneficial for users.

Your consumers want your brand to play a useful role in their day-to-day life.

If you make shoes, tell them where the best running trails and routes are.

If you are an entertainment brand, give your consumers exclusive content, or let them become the creator through a suite of tools.

If you are a retailer, help them find your location, and give them timely promotions if they are mobile, you will know if they are in your store so make use of this incredibly useful information and reward them for choosing you and not

your competitor.

3. How will consumers know that the application exists?

Applications need support from marketing just like the product or service that the application is intended to promote.

This is why, for most brands, a foray into mobile marketing should not focus solely on the release of a branded application.

Consider how your application strategy supports, and is supported by not only digital media, but your offline marketing mix as well.

Sure, your application may be successful in driving customers to your retail store, but is retail pushing even more customers to engage with your application or mobile Web site?

Consider how SMS or mobile coupons and rebates will help build awareness of your overall mobile footprint, and keep integration in mind.

With more than 15,000 applications being approved by Apple's App Store each week, it is easy for an application to go unnoticed.

To avoid this, broader marketing measures need to be taken. Simply rolling out an application is no longer enough.

Application marketing requires a targeted strategy, a microsite, a media budget and promotion to build awareness and engagement with the brand.

The branded application should be part of a broader multichannel experience, be that mobile, online, social and offline tactics.

Essentially, the marketing of an application needs to be adequately budgeted for and approached like the marketing of any other product or service.

In addition to tried-and-true tactics, both online and offline, marketing within the mobile medium through targeted search or display advertising is a smart place to start.

4. How can the application stand out in app storefronts?

There are several other marketing opportunities within app stores themselves that are often overlooked.

Users are quick to make a decision in an app store, so having a compelling application icon and high-quality screenshots will ensure that your application stands out and is not confused with competitors.

Additionally, do not let the developer dictate the marketing language that is shown in the app storefront. This language needs to match the values of the brand.

5. How will success of the application be measured?

Mobile strategy does not end with the launch of an application.

In fact, it is after the application launch where you will often find the most valuable information from your users.

It is essential to track user comments, reviews and ratings to gauge whether or not your application is successfully filling the needs of users.

This feedback can then be taken to determine how improvements can be made to future versions.

In the increasingly cluttered application development, marketing and sales space, upfront, strategic and innovative thinking in the creation and release of applications remains paramount.

The mobile market grants ample opportunity for exposure, but can be a confusing landscape to break into and navigate.

Overall, mobile marketing strategy is often overlooked as businesses race to release applications.

As a result, the uptake and utility of the application often suffers.

To successfully elevate a brand through a mobile application, marketers and companies need to start by asking themselves some of the outlined questions.

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