

COLUMNS

How to engage the connected shopper

December 21, 2010



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The age of the connected shopper is here. Gone are the days of clipping coupons from the Sunday paper, scanning for sales in the buyer's guide and writing letters to customer service.

Today's ever-increasing digital lifestyle has created an empowered and demanding consumer who receives news online, pays the water bill without lifting a pen and chats with friends in 160-character texts.

To make their messages heard, retailers and brands must learn how to engage connected shoppers throughout the entire pre-store, in-store and post-store buying cycle.

Matching medium with message

To be effective, retailers and brands must communicate via mediums that shoppers understand: Internet, digital displays and mobile. Most importantly, that communication needs to be a strategic, integrated effort.

The Internet. Today's shoppers are info-maniacs and they can be.

In the time it takes to click "search," shoppers can find out who sells it, what it costs, read consumer reviews and research comparable product. The information is endless.

Retailer and brand Web sites must speak to shoppers in research mode.

Digital displays. Shoppers afflicted with ADD (Analog Deficit Disorder) see static signage as nothing more than wallpaper.

In-store digital signage and interactive displays provide shoppers with a medium that catches their attention and with strategic content provides them with bite-sized information that they can digest.

Retailers and brands are finding that capturing the shoppers' attention while they are in the store is a prime opportunity for education.

In-store digital media, including digital signage, interactive kiosks and music, provides retailers and brands with a great tool to generate increased awareness.

Digital displays are used for merchandising and promotions. But the future is using the screens as a means for educating shoppers on the tools available to them to make informed buying decisions such as online product research, loyalty programs, mobile messaging platforms and social media.

This allows shoppers to have the information at their fingertips and the retailer to decrease the number of trips made to a store while increasing revenue.

Mobile. Mobile messaging campaigns, mobile Web and applications are compelling ways for communicating with shoppers on the move.

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Retailers and brands can use mobile phones to alert customers to sales, provide them real-time product information, follow-up on a purchase or send promotional codes and coupons.

Broadcasting and personalizing

Today's shoppers are not responsive to one-size-fits-all messaging.

With the proper in-store digital media network, retailers and brands can put their consumer research to use and target shoppers with relevant, personalized messaging based on time of day, day of week, geographic location and in-store location.

For example, MegaMart knows that on Tuesdays at 11 a.m. the typical shopper is a stay-at-home mom who values quality, is brand loyal and makes the majority of the buying decisions in the household.

While later that day at 5:30 p.m., the typical MegaMart shopper works full-time, comes from a two-income household and values convenience.

Using in-store digital media, MegaMart can tailor its message to speak to the type of shopper who is walking through its store at any given time.

Additionally, digital technologies are well suited for "one-to-many" broadcast solutions such as assisted shopping with engaging media or immersive experiences.

Online and mobile solutions can provide a more personalized experience with information or offers.

With so many digital options, it is more important than ever to tailor the message for the delivery platform to effectively reach the customer when he or she is most receptive to engagement.

Power of mobile

Today, with the Internet at their fingertips, shoppers are doing price comparisons, reading reviews and checking product availability from their mobile phones while standing in-store.

Retailers and brands need to be thinking of ways to engage customers via their mobile devices in-store to help them make informed purchase decisions while capturing real-time data for insights, market research and future marketing.

However, it is important that retailers and brands deliver targeted information and not one-way generalized messaging.

Integrating in-store digital media with mobile engagement strategies allows for the following programs to be executed:

Rewards and loyalty

Product comparisons

Market research

Product reviews

Product upgrades

Waiting lists for product releases

Awareness and time-to-market are key

An important consideration for mobile messaging campaigns is effectively generating awareness.

While it is true that more shoppers are now mobile-savvy and receptive to on-the-go engagement, it is crucial to easily create awareness.

In-store digital signage can help to initiate engagement and maintain the connection with shoppers after their store visit and before their return.

Also, digital signage provides the ability to target messaging by location and time, with the message time-to-market greatly reduced over traditional static signage and promotional materials.

Multichannel retailing is now a key strategic component for most retailers and brands.

Using digital technologies to create and foster loyal shopper relationships is now critical.

Choosing the right technology channels to work in harmony is the challenge, but the results are showing that success is worth the effort.

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