HOW TO SUCCEED AT MOBILE MARKETING

Marketers need to meet consumers on the platforms they’re already using and connect the dots between them

BY SAM DEL ROWE

On one Monday last February, Chipotle Mexican Grill closed all of its locations across the country during the lunchtime rush to run a food safety training program for all 50,000 of its employees nationwide. The move, which came in response to an E. coli outbreak that originated at several of Chipotle’s restaurants, greatly inconvenienced a lot of customers. To make it up to them, the company turned to a mobile marketing solution from Vibes to offer consumers free burritos via an SMS campaign that reached 5.3 million Americans. Affected customers could text the word “raincheck” to 888-222 before 6 p.m. that same day to get in on the promotion.

For many consumers, this might have been just one of the 150 to 200 mobile moments they experience each day, according to a report from Forrester Research. The majority of these are micro-moments—in which consumers can identify information to be consumed or acted on immediately with just a quick glance at their smartphones.

Despite Chipotle’s success with the mobile marketing campaign—the company saw a 67 percent redemption rate—most businesses aren’t capitalizing on some of the most popular methods of connecting with consumers via mobile device, according to the Forrester report. Just 45 percent of business professionals incorporate SMS into their marketing efforts, with even fewer—25 percent—using push notifications, the research found.

“Any time you get into this linear thinking of ‘I need a mobile team’ or ‘I need an email team,’ you’re ignoring the way that human behavior actually is,” says Meghan Anderson, vice president of content at HubSpot, a provider of inbound marketing and sales platforms. “[When] we use our mobile devices...our experience is a tapestry of all of these different mechanisms for getting answers.”

According to Anderson, three basic types of notifications can reach mobile device users. The first is SMS, the text messages that have been standard on devices of all kinds for years. Second is the push notification, which is triggered by applications from which users have chosen to receive updates. Third is the email notification, which has long been the backbone of marketers’ mobile campaigns. Jessica Ekholm, a research director at Gartner, predicts that email marketing is still likely to be king over the next five years.
While email continues to be essential, marketers should also be taking advantage of the other channels consumers use on their mobile devices. Moreover, marketers need to shift their approach to engage with customers on the channels they are already using, presenting them with relevant information at the right moment.

“Marketers are very accustomed to a one-to-many way of thinking that comes from TV and from broadcast. They think about what their business needs are. They want to send out campaigns and do things like email and messaging based on what their schedule is. This is a fundamental way that mobile is very different, because mobile is about one-to-one engagement...and that means that on my time, when I have a need, [you can] send me a message,” says Julie Ask, a Forrester vice president and principal analyst serving e-business and channel strategy professionals.

But all too often, companies want to own their interactions with customers, Ask goes on to say. “They have this assumption that if a customer wants to do business with them, then they come to their store, their website, their app,” she states.

While this model might have been effective 10 or 20 years ago, Ask says that it “doesn’t work as well today, and it especially doesn’t work well on mobile, where consumers spend a lot of their time in just a handful of apps.”

For this reason, businesses should not build and launch apps simply for the sake of having them. Instead, apps need to serve a clear purpose and deliver value to customers.

Consumers aren’t the only ones to benefit from effective mobile apps. Ekholm notes that these kinds of apps can offer “specialized branded user experiences in a more controlled environment.”

Nevertheless, “marketers will need to reach out through new marketing avenues...to be part of the conversation where the customer is,” she argues.

Social media and messaging platforms are two such avenues. Both provide the opportunity for one-to-one interactions with customers, which means that companies need to take extra care that their communications provide something of value to consumers. Furthermore, they need to provide a consistent experience on all platforms and channels.

But Meghann York, director of product marketing at Salesforce Marketing Cloud, says delivering the right message at the right time is “more difficult to manage when those channels are disconnected.”

“It’s really the customer who chooses the channel,” she says, “so marketers must be prepared to integrate them all seamlessly.”

And it’s difficult for marketers to “paint a complete picture of a customer’s attributes” when the data for each channel is stored and managed separately, she adds.

To ensure that their communications are personalized, marketers should pay attention to the information that consumers input into these channels. In particular, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter offer a wealth of information about users that companies can draw upon to enhance their communications, especially if they are interacting with consumers on a one-to-one basis.

**MESSAGING, THE NEW SOCIAL MEDIA**

While social media channels like Facebook and Twitter were once novel, that is hardly the case today. Now messaging apps like WhatsApp, WeChat, and Facebook’s own Messenger have quickly become consumer favorites. In fact, in 2015, messaging apps surpassed social media apps in popularity around the world. The combined user base of the top four chat apps is larger than the combined user base of the top four social networks.

Chat apps also have higher retention and usage rates than most mobile apps.

These apps promote quick, one-to-one communications between parties, and companies would do well to explore the opportunities they present.

“When you look at what the most commonly used mobile apps are...the ones that are really emerging are these new messaging apps. Messaging has surpassed social media in terms of total adoption worldwide and in terms of the hours spent in those apps,” Anderson says.

Ekholm agrees: “Messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger, Slack, and WeChat are all moving towards becoming the go-to platform for users, not just for chat but also for commerce.” She cites Facebook’s 2015 move to link Messenger with Uber as a successful example. The integration enabled users to request Uber rides directly from within the Messenger app.

Bots are following the same trajectory. Most recently, Facebook has been expanding its bot library, suggesting that it intends to continue pursuing what’s become known as “conversational commerce.”

The Canadian messaging app company Kik has also invested heavily in bots, Ekholm says, and the Facebook-owned WhatsApp recently removed its $1 annual fee, citing the potential of conversational commerce as the reason. China’s WeChat and Japan’s Line, she notes, have been offering these types of services for years.

“A bot is a way for you to open up a channel of communication within somebody else’s app,” Anderson explains. “If we wanted to use Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp or Line, for example, we could create a bot that could communicate through those channels and those apps that we know our customers are already using.”

The emergence of conversational commerce has a number of potential impacts, according to Ekholm. First, it
will de-emphasize company websites. If consumers can get the answers they need through the messaging apps that they’re already using, there’s less incentive for them to visit company websites.

In addition, it will make search engine optimization efforts less important as user preference shifts to contextual discovery within conversational platforms. It will reduce the number of steps in the purchase flow, improving the customer experience and potentially yielding more sales. Finally, as messaging platforms are enriched with new capabilities, their importance will be solidified, and the number of apps that users rely on will continue to fall.

Ekholm also identifies several new opportunities that conversational commerce could produce. By continually enhancing their integrations with messaging platforms, companies will discover new ways to engage with consumers, improving not only their commerce opportunities but also their brand reach.

Additionally, bot technology will continue to improve and could be a tremendous source of customer information when combined with the data customers with questions or problems they might have.”

Anderson agrees, saying that we’re entering an era where “consumers will pick the right channel for the right conversations.” When that happens, “it will be up to the company to be in that channel and connect the dots [from different channels] on who the customer is,” she explains.

Ekholm says that while marketers might be excited about the opportunities messaging platforms present, consumers could be skeptical about interacting with companies there. Marketers, she continues, should view messaging apps as “a new, innovative channel” that warrants a watchful eye and a few small-scale trials.

**A NOTE ON SNAPCHAT**

One of the more unique messaging apps is Snapchat, which has seen a meteoric rise in popularity. The multimedia platform enables users to send each other disappearing photo and video content called snaps—a model that contrasts with those of social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter, where posts are more permanent and can be difficult to delete.

As of September, Snapchat counted more than 60 million daily active users in the United States and Canada. Needless to say, businesses have taken notice of the app’s popularity. Companies like Coca-Cola, Gatorade, and Vans have all partnered with Snapchat on advertising campaigns, and many more are starting to line up.

“Brands of all sorts are on Snapchat, from retail brands like Target to news outlets like The Huffington Post,” York says. “They all have something in common: They tell great stories. Snapchat is foremost a visual channel with text capabilities. Through personalized photos and video clips, you have the opportunity to create your own personality as a brand and use it to fully capture someone’s attention.”

Companies have three advertising options on Snapchat, according to Ekholm. The first of these are Snap Ads, which are full-screen vertical videos of up to 10 seconds in length. Users can swipe upward for more content, such as longer videos, app installs, or articles. The second is Sponsored Lenses, an augmented reality feature that enables users to alter their images with branded content. Last May, Taco Bell, for example, ran a campaign that enabled users to turn their heads into living tacos. A Gatorade campaign that coincided with last year’s Super Bowl allowed users to pour a virtual cooler of Gatorade over their heads. The third option is Sponsored Geofilters, which are artistic overlays—often location-specific—that users can add to their snaps.

However, given the personal nature of communications on the platform, marketers need to be especially careful when engaging with its users.

“Marketers should be studying the channel and figuring out what feels natural on that channel. Don’t take your existing marketing campaigns and just transfer them over to Snapchat. Make sure that you understand how people use Snapchat and what they like about it, what draws them into it, and make sure that the content that you create for the channel reflects all of that,” Anderson says.

But in the end, whether it’s Snapchat or any of the dozens of other mobile platforms available today, complacency cannot be tolerated.

Just as marketers tried to duplicate their approaches when each new channel—starting with Facebook, then YouTube, then LinkedIn, and then Twitter—emerged, many marketers today “are trying to rinse and repeat their existing strategy, and I would advise that you learn the platform, learn what works well on it, and craft your strategies around that,” Anderson says.

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