

The proof is in the omni-channel experience this festive season

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As the market intensifies in the build-up to the festive season, retailers in particular, are needing to communicate more intuitively and intelligently to connected consumers. It would seem that investing in mobile driven solutions such as apps would be a no-brainer. Yet, worldwide research is indicating that retail apps, that solely offer basic brochureware, are failing to deliver on the user engagement promise.



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Shifting product is one of the most pressing issues facing most retailers today and yet at the [World Retail Awards](#), it was surprising to see that, even on a global scale, very few brands were able to leverage the power of mobile to effectively shift their products. Although smart app owners understand the long-term time investment needed to drive engagement - could omni-channel experiences be the silver bullet of retail apps?

Consumer research

According to a research study conducted by e-Bay, connected consumers who use "multiple sources of product information when shopping, including in-store displays, retailer websites, online review sites, online market places and social media" enables them to research and make purchases at their convenience and in their own time. This alone opens up countless opportunities for retailers to shift their products more effectively. An example cited in e-Bay's research indicates that "up to 25% of recent online or mobile purchases in the UK and Germany involved products that customers could not have purchased locally. This represents nearly €9bn (£7.4bn) in online sales in the UK in 2012, and up to €7bn (£5.7bn) in online and mobile sales in Germany."

For one, the omni-channel experience empowers the consumer with choice, i.e. products that may have been previously unavailable at one retailer can be instantly sourced and purchased from another. The omni-channel gateway has also created inroads for retailers to deepen and personalise the customer journey. Retailers can now activate deeply personal and relevant journeys with their customers by providing information and interacting across multiple digital touch points.

Let's explore some possible tactics:

Push notifications, some of which the most recent ones in the iOS8 and Android 4.3, can be used to prompt users to take specific actions. Deep links are offered that direct users to a dedicated landing page to prompt a relevant and actionable experience. Understanding and tracking consumers' app habits whilst they are browsing and relevantly notifying them of specials of their frequently-browsed items, is creating an intuitive experience. Once this intelligence has been gained, motivating targeted actions, such as obtaining a reward for brand loyalty, will be far more valuable and relevant to the consumer.

If the brand has a bricks-and-mortar store together with an app store, consumers will appreciate being presented with an

integrated brand experience. For example searching for an item on the app will tell them of the nearest store and if the item is in stock. They can then complete the purchase on the app and be given the choice of going into the store to collect the product, or having it delivered. "Click and collect", is a very simple concept that has taken off really well overseas.

How can retailers leverage multiple channels to drive sales growth?

It's all about empowering the consumer with choice. But increased choice drives competition which will demand that retailers stay ahead of the curve in terms of how they interact with and remain relevant to the consumer.

This brings us to the issue of brand loyalty. Enabling the consumer with choice creates a need to intensify brand awareness and the flexibility brought about by omni-channel shopping can be a stepping stone to instilling loyalty and goodwill.

When faced with the question of ROI, rather than focussing solely on download numbers - a far better measure of relevance and value to the user, is the rate of engagement or the extent to which they are interested enough to interact with the app and transact with the retailer.

Unfortunately, the reality is that most retailers are not leveraging the power of mobile phones to aid the consumer on their path to purchase. This is further exacerbated by large retailers who push individual channels rather than integrating each channel into a collective in order to service the customer across multiple digital contact points.

Retailers need to wise up to the age of the digitally connected consumer, who is disrupting the retail space by demanding more attentive servicing through technology. This is ultimately an integrated effort and not an afterthought for the app to magically inherit.

ABOUT LYNETTE HUNDERMARK

With over 15 years of experience in the tech, digital marketing and mobile solutions space, Hundermark co-founded specialist mobile solutions consultancy Useful & Beautiful. With a passion for developing mobile products that are aligned to business goals, Hundermark's appetite for keeping abreast of the latest industry trends is fast establishing her as an expert tech commentator and opinion leader in South Africa. Follow @lynetteanthony on Twitter.

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