

From search to checkout, the top 5 features likely to make your user tap "buy now"

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Mobile, and increasingly apps, are core to the success of any retailer's strategy through all stages of the path to purchase or shopping customer's experience, from initial research through to completing their purchase.



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Year on year, app store trends have seen sustained a growth in shopping apps. This has created awareness amongst retailers that a mobile presence is imperative, however, what can marketers do to ensure that the mobile consumer acquired stays loyal to the channel?

Here are top 5 key areas to always consider:

1. Knowing your customer: Personalising the omnichannel experience

As marketers, we need to understand that mobile starts with an understanding of how fiercely personal this device is, it has become more of an appendage rather than a device. While waiting to pay for your goods at a supermarket or departmental store, you will notice that instead of looking at sweets or socks, people are pretty much attached to their phones.

With that as a starting point, it's easy for us to then understand that mobile is connecting us to our digital worlds but increasingly it is also about activity in the real world and about real connections. Mobile is the bridge between the physical and digital worlds and that is exciting for us as marketers – as the messaging can start on mobile and then extend to the real world with real results.

Approaching mobile alone, however, is an expensive mistake that retail brands are making. Brands can no longer afford to still 'think channel' as they have to look at customer experience with all channels integrated (mobile, online, social, bricks and mortar) or risk losing significant market share.

Despite how great an app or mobile idea is, remember that your app is just another touch-point in your digital ecosystem and it is a consumer expectation for it to work seamlessly across all channels. The mobile phone is the one thing your consumer will carry with them no matter where they are and if there is one experience that you want to get right, it's the experience your customer has on mobile. It has to be a unified experience that brings all channels together.

In the digital economy of today, in particular, retail consumers will create the omnichannel experience themselves by using mobile as a catalyst (e.g. looking up product information and price comparisons) to drive them in-store where they will complete the path to purchase. With the shift to cognitive marketing, you will know what your customer intents are based on their activity from their mobile device, followed through to their browsing patterns which may lead to conversions. Based on this and other data, you have the insights at hand to tailor relevant messaging and deliver personalised products and information.

In the consumers' eye, the perspective is very much a case of: "You know who I am and what I am consuming, please send me relevant offers that I am likely to purchase." People want more customisation and personalisation and marketing strategies need to change accordingly to cater for this. Amazon has been the leader in personalisation and continues to grow, going from strength to strength. In the US alone, Amazon tends to be miles ahead of its competitors.



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2. From the app store user experience to signup: Reduce friction

App user experience starts in the app store, and as a retailer you need to make sure your app is easily discoverable, as it takes effort from your consumer to look through the myriad of apps available to find your one. Even though most retail apps are free (i.e. not paid-for apps), once your user finds your app, they will need to download that app which (if not on Wi-Fi), requires utilising precious (and expensive) mobile data – which ultimately costs the user.

Now that the user has your app downloaded on their phone, they will want to start using it immediately so it is important that the initial “buy-in” experience is good. This involves ensuring your app does not have any lag in app performance, i.e. it must not be slow or consumes mobile data unnecessarily.

Typically, when a user downloads an app, they want to see what value it will offer them before giving up personal details during the registration or sign up process. Should the user see the benefits of using the app or if you as a brand insist on getting the user to sign up, make this as frictionless as possible, by asking for the minimum details. If you are requesting your user to disclose personal information, provide guidance for them as to why you are requesting this information – the more your user is able to trust you, the more likely they are to buy from you.

Consider signups that meet your user expectations, some users prefer one-touch signups via social media integrations (such as Facebook and Google), while others prefer to manually create their accounts. Respect your users’ choices and don’t enforce your preferences onto them.



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3. Tailoring the mobile user experience

The mobile device is a small screen. Taking the traditional desktop e-commerce experience and shrinking it onto the mobile device, delivers an experience that is simply too overwhelming for the mobile user. Even desktop experiences are now moving towards the “less is more” trend and the consumer wants to be able to complete their purchases in the minimum amount of time and with as few clicks as possible.

Taking this into account, a fail for a brand is to assume that all desktop functionality should be replicated on the mobile device. Keep the mobile user experience simple and restricted to what a mobile consumer is likely to perform on the mobile device. Research has shown that price comparisons are a popular mobile activity, so make it easy for your consumer to get product information quickly with the relevant product information they require, which means it’s up to the retailer to ensure product data is always up to date.

It is very unlikely that your user is going to browse through an extensive catalogue on your mobile device (not to mention the amount of mobile data loading full catalogue will consume), but there is a high probability they will be using search – so ensure search works well. Incorporate visual searches and barcode scanning as part of the search user journey as trends have shown preference for visual searches from leading brands such as Amazon, eBay and Alibaba.

4. Trustworthy payments

If you are expecting your user to purchase, integrate frictionless payments or trustworthy secure payments. Especially when taking someone’s money, user buy-in is important for customer retention or repetitive buying (which is ultimately what every retailer wants). Consider offering a range of trusted payment options to your user such as credit/debit card integration or with tried and tested digital mobile wallet solutions, rather than recreating one from scratch.



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5. Core mobility functionality and messaging

Understanding what the user is likely to do on their mobile phone is key. The app has to be part of the overall customer experience, so while a user may not be as comfortable purchasing on their phone, they are likely to want to track order statuses of their purchases (which could have initiated on the desktop or via a call centre) or monitor pricing updates.

Never doubt the power of push notifications and if used effectively, these will not be treated as spam. Effective ways of using push messages include:

- You should have access to insights about their online behaviour, location, preferred usage time, etc. This gives you a unique opportunity to be able to fine-tune and target your messaging. Make it personal. Ask your users what they'd like to receive or see more of and in return, you can give push notifications they are likely to find valuable based on their needs and preferences.
- Carefully consider in-app messages. Keep in mind that every push does not deserve a shove. Some messaging may be better served inside the app itself rather than running the risk of annoying your users by sending an unwarranted home screen notification. Never lose sight of the fact that it is all about your customer and push messaging can come across as invasive, as it takes someone out of what they are doing and distracts them.

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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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