

Mobile strategies for African retailers in 2014

Mobile marketing is near the top of everyone's priority list right now, but knowing you *should* be doing something is not the same as knowing *what* to do - and with the medium being so new, there are no clear best practice guidelines yet.



By Bevan Ducasse 13 Nov 2013



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At wiGroup, we've spent the past five years developing and delivering a platform that enables retailers, brands, agencies, banks, mobile apps and mobile wallets to work together to make mobile marketing and mobile transacting easy. In the process we've worked with a lot of retailers and learned from every one of them. These are the three most important lessons we've taken away so far.

1. Implement, measure, adapt, repeat

Whatever campaign a retailer embarks on - whether it's implementing a loyalty programme, partnering with a brand for a special promotion or launching a series of special offers - the ultimate point is to deliver more sales at the till.

So far, so obvious; but mobile brings something new to the party. For the first time ever, it's now possible to track the sales impact of every campaign in fine detail, from first touch to till.

This is a big deal. Sure, it's always been possible to check the sales impact the next day after a new ad airs: But now you can do that at the level of the individual customer. Which deals do they go for? What's the lag between getting the voucher and completing the sale? What messages are most effective at triggering impulse buys? What's the real impact of in-store media? You can measure it all

And then, of course, you need to take it one step further: Change what you're doing based on what the numbers are telling you. Do more of what works, and try something different to what isn't working. Check the numbers again, and tweak again. Do this until you're an expert at fine-tuning your campaign on the fly.

2. Play to your strengths

Retailers aren't all technology experts. Fortunately, they don't have to be - that's what technology suppliers are for. What retailers are experts at, the one thing they seem to do better than anybody else is understanding their customers.

That customer insight, not knowledge of technology, is what drives a successful mobile marketing campaign. To take just one example, during 2013 we saw mass-market retailers like Shoprite Checkers starting to offer prepaid airtime as loyalty rewards. We think this is, frankly, a stroke of genius. R2 or F500 of airtime means nothing to the average reader of a business magazine, who's probably on a postpaid contract anyway - but to the average South African, it's a real reward.

A retailer needs the right technology platform in place to enable campaigns like this, of course - but that's done, the possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

3. Look for inspiration in the right places

We've read a lot of white papers in the past few years, and a lot of research reports and articles full of advice on how to do mobile marketing. Most of them have one thing in common: They're not much help in a South African or African context. The reality of North America, Europe and other developed-economy markets is near-universal smartphone penetration, relatively high disposable incomes and a population that's so media-saturated there's a constant arms race to see who can produce the biggest Next Big Thing.

Our local reality is very different. Smartphone penetration may be growing rapidly, but it will continue to be a minority for the next couple of years at least. Disposable incomes are so low people will go out of their way for R2 of airtime - and people are more media starved than media saturated.

A different landscape calls for a different strategy - and those who win are going to be those who understand this best.

ABOUT BEVAN DUCASSE

After completing his Financial Analysis studies at Stellenbosch University, Bevan joined UCS solutions as a junior consultant. He went on to work at a firm in the mobile payment industry and slowly started to connect the dots between business, retail and mobile systems and seeing how the three could work seamlessly together.
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