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Consumer Mobility Empowers Retailers, Too

A growing legion of mobile consumers with demanding fulfillment expectations are challenging retailers, but those who have engaged are benefitting greatly.

by Matt Pillar

Many retailers are struggling with their customers' relatively newfound ability to access information anytime and anywhere. Device-enabled consumers create more competition and require more information to convert them to a sale. But some retailers have tackled the challenge head-on and are realizing mobile-empowered consumers create valuable opportunities to gather intelligence, delight customers, and facilitate sales. I talked with Fab Di Carlantonio, SVP sales and marketing at Cactus Commerce, about what he's seeing.

What consumer-demand drivers are shaping retailers' approaches to mobile and kiosk marketing?

Di Carlantonio: The medium term focus for many retailers is to deliver in-store mobile content that is relevant and personalized to augment the shopping experience. The blending of mobile and in-store, as most retailers recognize, isn't simply enough to enable Web-based content to appear on a mobile device. The challenge is how to create an integrated, cross-channel mobile solution to provide a compelling shopping experience that attracts and retains customers.

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Cross-Channel Retailing

As an example, the Nova Scotia Liquor Control Board leverages consumers' mobile devices in an effort to know what the consumer wants *before* they know they want it. By integrating Web, in-store systems, and purchase histories as well as actively gathering customer information such as birthdays, these insights contribute to customer intelligence. By anticipating customers' purchases and special days and communicating that knowledge to them in context and on their terms, you create lifelong customers and make your best customers even better.

What are some threats and opportunities created by an increasingly mobile consumer?

Di Carlantonio: Mobile consumers certainly create an opportunity that retailers need to treat seriously. The first step is to consider how to engage customers differently with mobile. You can engage customers in many different ways, from text messaging to mobile multimedia. Developing a content strategy vision to identify your distinct data/information sources and how they can be optimized in a mobile scenario to improve the sales cycle will be key to providing an exceptional customer experience in the near future.

Mobile device-savvy consumers will want to scan merchandise in the store with their device to learn more about it — what it does/doesn't do, product ratings and reviews, price comparisons, and so on. In addition, they expect to see specific promotions and coupons that are available in their local store. That's the kind of content people are looking to receive on their smart phones and similar devices. The potential for retailers is the ability to measure the effectiveness of local in-store promotions and to refine offers in real time. When you can measure which products are most reviewed, purchased, or abandoned, you can adjust the merchandising message as needed.

The Web is still a place for searching and learning, but it's becoming embedded in everything we do. If you're not providing this type of content, it is likely that another brand will, and ultimately they will be more likely to convert these shoppers into buyers.

In the case of the Nova Scotia Liquor Control Board, they enable customers to personalize "favorite" wine lists in stores via mobile devices which help them recall which wines to purchase. An expert recommends pairings of wine and food to help clients explore new products. Recognizing how a mobile device could help enable customers to access important information in its stores resulted in not only incremental sales, but also improved overall customer satisfaction. ■

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