

Mobilising m-commerce

By Thierry Costa

Optimising the m-commerce site to increase sales and customer loyalty

If you're like most multichannel retailers, you're probably thinking about how to develop a mobile-commerce site that will give your customers the experience they expect when they're shopping on-the-go. Or, maybe your mobile site is already up and running, but you're not seeing the growth in traffic and usage you were expecting. Whatever the case, now is a great time to prepare or improve your mobile site to meet the increasing numbers of mobile shoppers. To do so, you must not only consider shoppers' buying behaviour, but also create a cohesive web-to-mobile experience and make site search the focal point.

Just as the internet lured consumers away from bricks-and-mortar stores and fuelled the commerce revolution, the widespread use of mobile devices and convenience they provide is compelling shoppers to research and buy

products via their iPhones, Androids, and a host of other devices. According to a recent study conducted by Verdict Research, 11.5 percent of all UK shoppers are using their mobiles to research before shopping, while 3.8 percent use them to research, engage and interact with retailers while they're out shopping. Additionally, Verdict estimates that in 2009, internet shopping sales via mobile devices was worth £122.9 million, and the research group predicts that by 2013, mobile commerce sales will grow to £275 million. Given this, the time for online businesses to embrace the mobile revolution is here.

So, how do you get started? One of the main things to focus on is delivering a consistent experience to your customers. While you want the look and feel of your online and mobile sites to match, you also need to identify the essential website content and features that will create a high-impact mobile experience, and those that will degrade the experience. For example, star ratings on product listings are useful and take up little mobile screen space, whereas large images that are slow to load

and take up screen space will lend to a frustrating experience.

You also need to understand how customers view the mobile shopping experience, so you're not just creating a downsized version of your regular site. We like to call mobile shoppers "hunters"—as they're usually out to find a very specific product or information about a product. Web shoppers are "browsers", as they have more time and screen space to browse multiple items. Also, while research shows that most mobile consumers currently use their devices to research products and comparison-shop, many people conduct mobile research while standing inside the store. So if they're armed with enough compelling information, they may decide to put the item in their basket and go to the till.

Site search plays a critical role

As with traditional online retail, a robust site search on your mobile site can make the difference between an unsatisfying shopping experience and a great one that provides fast, relevant results, and a reason for customers to come back. There are several reasons site search is one of the most critical features of the mobile "hunting" experience. Limited screen real estate and typing capabilities make it cumbersome to navigate from page to page or product to product. Also, slow page-loading times on mobile networks means pages have to be simple and lightweight. And since most mobile shoppers have a specific product in mind, typing something in the search box is the fastest way to get them to the information they seek.

Early action, early rewards

As more and more consumers use their mobile devices to research products and make purchases on the go, a huge opportunity for new revenue streams lies ahead. The challenge is to embrace the m-commerce trend early—and to do so while paying close attention to the consumer experience. This means taking into consideration customer buying behaviour, and also focusing on creating a cohesive web-to-mobile experience that puts site search at the forefront.



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Optimising search for a solid visitor experience:

- **Give the search box prominent placement on a mobile site.** Ensure it's easy to find and use.
- **Ensure relevant search results.** With less room to show refinement options, an m-commerce site should provide the most relevant results from a keyword search on the first page. Scrolling through pages of results or clicking on refinement options requires more time for additional page loads, and may result in shoppers abandoning the site.
- **Go light on images.** Pictures should be just thumbnails so as not to slow down page loads. The mobile screen doesn't allow for lengthy product descriptions or the many site navigation links that you would find on normal search results pages either.
- **Include easy access to product reviews.** Consumers often use mobile devices when they are shopping in-store. User reviews are a great way to give visitors more detail when making a purchasing decision.
- **Let customers check local availability from search results.** Provide a link that lets mobile shoppers enter their postcode and see what nearby locations have items in stock. Consider taking it a step further to allow users to place items on hold, to be picked up at a later time.
- **Add another search box at the bottom of the page.** This way, if users get to the bottom of the results page and want to conduct another search, they can do so easily without having to scroll back to the top.
- **Account for misspellings.** Just as you should with your ecommerce site, avoid "no results" pages, and make sure your site search factors in typos, as they'll be more common on mobile devices with small keypads or touch screens.
- **Include large links and spacing.** To accommodate users of touchscreen phones, links should be easy to click on and spaced appropriately. Otherwise, it can be difficult for mobile users to select the correct link.—TC