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Ten Tips for Creating Engaging Mobile Experiences: Functionality and Design for Mobile Commerce

Executive Overview

Mobile users are different. They demand experiences that are more engaging than what you offer your desktop customers but are constrained by limited screen real estate, time, and capabilities. Businesses must compensate for these limitations with functionality that creates a compelling mobile environment that will engage and convert users—and keep them coming back. The following 10 tips outline how to create a compelling mobile interface that will drive user adoption, cross-channel activity, and repeat business.

Introduction

Your mobile environment should

1. Help users find what they want in the easiest, fastest way possible
2. Provide an experience compelling enough that they'll come back

Think of mobile users as your average customers with less patience and time. The combination of a small screen and the expectation that information will be instant means that you must create features to streamline the user experience to capture their attention and keep them engaged.

When users engage with the mobile channel, they have a different set of needs than those using a Website. They may be walking down the street, purchasing, waiting in line, or using their phone for a quick search instead of reaching for the computer. In any case, these users are in a rush and easily distracted. They don't have much time to research or buy, and even less time to familiarize themselves with a new environment. They are easily frustrated by interruptions, awkward keyboards, and slow performance.

There are many obstacles to overcome in the mobile channel, so put yourself in the heads and shoes of your customers. Give them the tools to find what they want quickly and control their experience. Base mobile functionality on this question: What features would I want if I had 6 square inches and 60 seconds to work with?

Just having a mobile touchpoint available is not a long-term strategy. You must invest in an optimized experience, especially as mobile becomes critical to your overall strategy. Mobile devices provide a totally new opportunity for you to engage in an ongoing dialogue with customers and for customers to build new relationships with your brand—so take full advantage by acting on the 10 tips outlined in this white paper.

Tip 1: Keep It Clean and Simple

You need to engage your customers immediately and keep latency low, or you risk losing them—potentially for good. Your user interface should be simple and invite exploration—so don't overwhelm visitors with options. Expose only the most important content, and make sure functionality is useful for someone on the go without access to a computer. Aesthetically, make your environment eye-catching, uncluttered, and intuitive.

How critical is mobile? By 2014 more consumers will access brands via mobile devices than from computers.¹

Tip 2: Design for Devices and Environments

The environment(s) and devices you choose to support will drive elements of your mobile design. If you are creating a mobile Website, keep in mind that users access the mobile Web from many platforms, which means that understanding the devices your audience uses is critical. If you are building a mobile application, be aware that different apps must be created for different platforms. An app designed for the iPhone will not be usable on an Android device, and a mobile Website designed specifically for the BlackBerry will look different on a Nokia device. Educate your team on how mobile Websites and apps are rendered on different devices.²

Users expect different experiences from mobile Websites and apps, so design your offering with the strengths of each environment in mind:

Apps: Don't Reinvent What the Apple and Android Platforms Have Gotten Right

App users expect a richer experience and will spend more time in the environment, so invest in delivering polished, robust features. Take visual cues from the apps that millions of customers have happily adopted. The Apple and Android platforms have essentially set the rules for mobile user interfaces, so don't try to reinvent what is already considered a best practice. Mimic simple, clean features such as picker wheels, category navigation, sliders, and buttons. If your environment is familiar, users will engage immediately.

¹ Morgan Stanley Research, January 2011.

² To determine what environments, technologies, and devices to support, see the Oracle white paper “Six Steps for Building a Long-Term Mobile Strategy.”



Figure 1. Mimic familiar, adopted designs and functionality to drive immediate engagement. Don't overdesign. Instead, use simple Apple and Android app features already considered best practices.

Mobile Websites: Align the Experience Around Fast, Frequent Use

Until HTML5 is widely adopted, mobile Web capabilities will not be as robust as mobile apps. But mobile Websites get high traffic volume and lots of repeat hits, so design with quality and frequency in mind. Provide light, top-line navigation; size buttons for fingers; keep links to a minimum; and compress content to avoid slow performance. Invest in device detection, so your Website is automatically reformatted for the platform it's being viewed on.

Whether you choose to build a mobile application or a mobile Website, make sure it's highly visual; interactive; easy to skim; and, above all, clean and simple.

Tip 3: Mirror Your Online Storefront

Even though your mobile environment should be optimized for a mobile device, it should follow the same general structure as your Website to make cross-channel activity seamless. If your mobile environment is familiar to customers and the buying process is simple, engagement will be higher.



Figure 2. Maximize real estate with a layered interface. Enable visitors to access rich content in a mobile-optimized layout and swipe through products horizontally.

Although your mobile environment and Website should share the same core structure, you cannot simply shrink your online storefront down to fit a mobile platform—exposing the entire category structure would be too overwhelming and risk site abandonment. Instead, use your analytics data to determine the most-popular categories and expose those on the home page. In doing this, you make it convenient for visitors to find the most-popular items quickly and are more likely to draw customers deeper into your environment. But make sure your entire product catalog is searchable—this way, returning customers who know exactly what they’re looking for can find it quickly. Utilize your existing Website technology for features such as advanced search and merchandising spotlights for your most popular (and lucrative) products and categories.

Tip 4: Make It Convenient

Helping visitors achieve their goals in as few steps as possible will increase your likelihood of closing a sale. Put users on their desired path as quickly as possible. Include enhanced features such as search type-ahead, automatic spelling correction, “did you mean?” prompts, and faceted navigation to reduce frustration as users deal with small screens and notoriously awkward mobile keyboards.

Your mobile offering must offer useful, real-world features if you want to drive adoption. Examples include one-touch features such as add to cart, add to wish list/favorites, and infinite scroll capabilities that enable users to view all search results without having to reload or flip through pages. Also useful are GPS capabilities, which benefit customers and your bottom line. Enable users to look up your closest storefront with a store locator feature, and use their location to push relevant promotions to their mobile device. Creating useful features will make the difference to your customers and set your mobile environment apart from your competition’s.



Figure 3. Use search features such as type-ahead and “did you mean?” along with location-based features to simplify the buying process. These features help users reach their goals quickly.

Tip 5: Let Users Be Social

Mobile users contribute twice as much social content as desktop users, so enable visitors to add content and promote products by integrating social capabilities. Make it easy for users to evangelize your products for you by writing mobile reviews, and enable them to share their reviews and wish lists with one-touch posting capabilities to Websites such as Facebook and Twitter. Add free Facebook social plug-ins to make it easy for visitors to share products, see what their friends have liked, and get recommendations. Additionally, making social content (such as products popular on Facebook) searchable and navigable throughout your Website will increase stickiness and boost conversion rates.

Mobile and social go hand-in-hand: of the 800 million Facebook users, 350 million of them engage from their mobile device every day.³

Tip 6: Make Every Experience Hyperpersonalized

Ensure that your promotions are always targeted, to avoid missing opportunities. Because mobile phones aren't shared devices, information should always be tailored to the user's context. With the limited time you have to engage mobile users, irrelevant promotions will frustrate them, take up valuable screen real estate, and push abandonment. Mobile devices are always on and with users, so rethink your traditional online promotions to enable users to take action with mobile offers immediately. Also, don't waste the visibility you have into mobile visitors. Use your analytics data to push contextual promotions and continually update your environment(s) to reflect the insight that users give you. Or integrate with the Facebook Open Graph to give all customers a more personalized experience by enabling them to use their own Facebook data.

Tip 7: Make Checkout Painless

The condensed opportunity to close a sale in the mobile channel makes investing in a seamless shopping cart experience critical. Make the checkout button large and available anytime an item is in the cart, and populate the customer's profile data (credit card, shipping address, and so forth) from your online store so that conducting transactions is a snap. Integrate with your existing Website infrastructure to sync .com activity (such as search, browse, and product comparison history) with your mobile environment so that customers can conveniently store their online purchase history or favorites list and easily complete transactions later on their mobile device or use it as an in-store product comparison tool.

³ Facebook, September 2011.

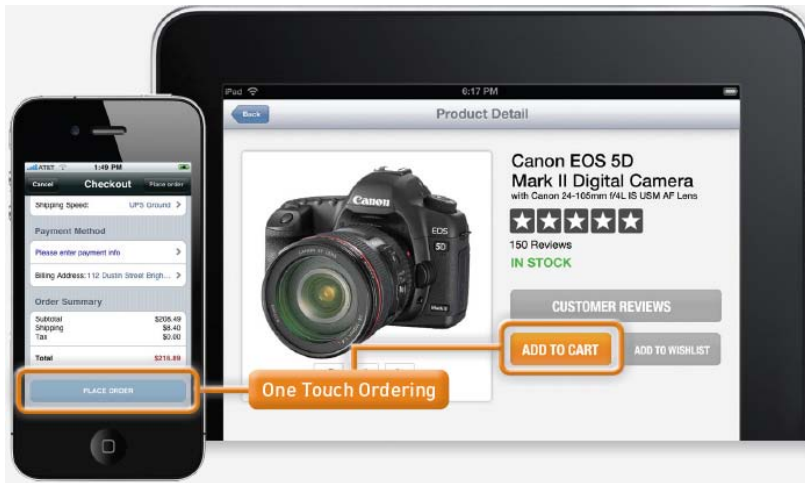


Figure 4. One-touch features simplify checkout. With even less time to convert sales with mobile users, make checkout easy and require as few steps as possible.

Tip 8: Motivate Users to Come Back

Create a way to entice users to come back to your mobile Website or application with features such as a loyalty program or exclusive offers. Toys “R” Us Asia has done this well with an interactive loyalty initiative that blends in-store, online, and mobile elements. The Toys “R” Us Asia iPhone application features the ability to scan quick response (QR) codes (dubbed “R” codes) in-store for product information such as reviews or videos. The more “R” codes the customers unlock, the more rewards—which include membership points and free gifts—they get. In addition, users get targeted mobile coupons and perks pushed to their mobile devices, based on their loyalty program status.



Figure 5. Toys “R” Us Asia draws users to its mobile Website with useful, entertaining features and exclusive offers.

Tip 9: Drive Cross-Channel Activity

Having a mobile environment provides ultimate transparency into the needs and behaviors of customers—so take advantage of this knowledge. Because phones are with users 24/7 and aren't shared devices, search history, behavior, and even their location are fully accessible and totally personal. Utilize this data to provide a more compelling mobile environment and improve the user experience in other channels as well. Make sure you're leveraging the voice of the customer data from your mobile investment to drive more traffic to your Website and brick-and-mortar stores.

Here are a few examples:

- To accelerate offline sales, give customers the ability to read user reviews, compare prices, or check inventory levels by using their mobile device in-store. Drive traffic to your mobile offering with in-store signage and QR codes.
- Use GPS features to push location-based offers to users in the vicinity of a store.
- Provide the ability to scan barcodes and conduct transactions via phone, bypassing checkout lines.
- Use mobile devices as a link to your Website. Leverage individual search and browse history from your Website to push targeted SMS promotions to mobile devices.
- Promote exclusive offers, sales, or merchandise on your mobile storefront linked to your Facebook store or Website.

Shoe retailer The Finish Line saw traffic coming from mobile devices quadruple in just two years, to 14 percent of overall traffic. The retailer launched a mobile program integrated with the in-store experience and the call center for cross-channel impact.⁴

Tip 10: Adapt to Your Users

If retail teams cannot take immediate action on data their customers give them, the value of mobile transparency will be lost. As more users engage and more data is gathered, your environment(s) should gradually align with the experience that visitors are demanding. Analytics are a must-have in the mobile channel, but so is the ability of business teams to use that data to tune the user experience. Any emerging channel requires extra scrutiny of how users are interacting—tracking this information early is critical to long-term success.

⁴ Roger Underwood, Senior Vice President, E-Commerce Operations & Technology, Finish Line Inc., September 2011.

Be sure your team has an emulator or the ability to test what features and layouts will look like in the device specific to your application, or on a variety of devices, before pushing changes to a mobile Website.

To ensure a successful mobile launch, consistent attention and updates will be necessary to deal with the quickly changing market and user demands. Make sure your mobile technology has tools that enable you to test merchandising strategies, features, and layouts and get changes to market quickly. If you can deliver a better experience faster than the competition, adoption of your mobile solution will increase, as will customer satisfaction and engagement. Mobile provides a unique opportunity to observe and mine user behavior—so listen and adapt.

Conclusion

To enable you to stay competitive, your mobile environment must be compelling enough for customers to adopt it and come back regularly. Know your target audience and how its needs, obstacles, and behaviors in the mobile channel differ from those on your online Website. Compensate for limitations in a mobile environment with features rooted in simplicity, convenience, and immediacy. The more engaging and useful your mobile environment is, the more your customers will return and spend.

Contact Us

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Authors: John Andrews and Brenna Johnson

Oracle Corporation
World Headquarters
500 Oracle Parkway
Redwood Shores, CA 94065
U.S.A.

Worldwide Inquiries:
Phone: +1.650.506.7000
Fax: +1.650.506.7200

oracle.com



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Hardware and Software, Engineered to Work Together