How the right mobile strategy can strengthen your customer service

Connected devices and smartphone use is growing, presenting clear opportunities for businesses to enhance their customer service. But getting the right mobile strategy requires businesses to take a far-reaching view.

by Andrew Matthews
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Adapting a mobile-first, connected-first business model has become more necessity than choice. According to the UK regulator Ofcom's Communication Market Report 2015, smartphones have now overtaken laptops as the most popular device for getting online, while more than half of all Google searches are made from a mobile device.

Customer engagement strategies will need to fall in line. As today's CEOs are aware, a high-quality customer experience is not just nice to have – it's essential for growth, profitability and even just maintaining market share. A brand that can engender loyalty is a brand that will survive, even in the face of disruption and incursion from rivals in adjacent sectors.

What that means in practice isn't always quite so obvious. Many companies still treat mobile as a discrete channel, separate from web and telephony. Others view mobile devices through the lens of limitation, seeing them as a scaled-down version of a PC.

More forward-thinking organisations see them differently. They're reinventing the web for mobile, carefully choosing what needs to be captured on each device. They are adopting true customer-centric business strategies, in which the customer can move seamlessly between platforms – and is free to choose what suits them at any given place or time.

A customer-centric business approach

This means creating a single customer profile across every channel of engagement. For instance, a customer might start booking a flight using an app, only to switch to a phone call later on. The customer service representative shouldn't start from scratch – they should already know the basis for the call.

Here's where we encounter "the phygital" – the space between the online and offline customer experience, where the physical and digital world intersect. We've all been there: browsing products on a phone, comparing the features and prices, before physically purchasing in a store.

But in the phygital space, it's difficult to measure the conversion rate of a sale without a true big data analytical solution – because the conversion rate is cross-channel. It complicates traditional marketing metrics and channel disciplines.

Under a customer-centric business model, communications are a two-way street. Take Hilton's Concierge app, which was launched in summer 2016. The app uses artificial intelligence to understand customer behaviour and anticipate their needs. Whenever the app user is experiencing difficulty, or otherwise deviating from the booking process, they receive a chat invitation. The customer experience team get involved proactively, ensuring the customer never gets frustrated.

Enabling web content and apps to work well across mobile devices is a must, then, to create that single customer ecosystem. Mobile devices have distinct advantages, too. Unlike laptops or tablets, they often come with biometric technologies such as fingerprint or iris pattern sign-in capabilities, such as Apple Touch ID. That makes them more secure and reliable as identifiers of a unique purchaser (and not, say, their husband or child using a laptop).

Phone cameras can also be used as scanners. For instance, the Kofax Mobile Capture Platform, which automatically extracts information from photos and videos, is being used by some banks to capture and "pay-in" cheques.

Fintech providers are finding other creative mobile solutions to solve customer problems, too. Small businesses can use receipt scanning technology for expenses, for instance. The data is imported straight into an accounting system, freeing up time to focus on customers.

Mobile moments

Importantly, a mobile device can improve the offline experience, too. This is less about shrinking down web or PC apps to fit a small screen and more taking advantage of 'mobile moments' – interactions triggered by location or use-state.

For example, so-called 'smart ship' MSC Meraviglia will set sail on its maiden voyage in June 2017 with all-areas near-field communication technology. Guests will be able to geolocate themselves or their children. They can also reserve a seat at the restaurant or book an excursion with a few swipes of the mobile app. For these cruise-goers, mobile choreographs their entire experience – it's not just a handy guide.

The next step is a post-screen world. As augmented reality (AR) becomes more prevalent, and the world becomes more connected, mobile will become a subset of the Internet of Things (IoT) where everyday objects are connected over the internet and interact through voice, gestures and even changes to the environment as we move through it.

Value creation

Where should companies invest, then? As they move towards a mobile-first approach, they need to ask how it will help them drive value – not just customer value, but enterprise value, too.

That might mean trade-offs. For instance, when it comes to mobile marketing, do you go with a large advertising campaign that might reach millions – or spend on deep analytics to target offers with greater finesse?

Ultimately, customer behaviour is the best determinant of what works. If customers don't change their behaviour – notably by spending more or increasing their brand loyalty – it would be hard to deem an initiative a success. It may help to pilot an innovation in a small customer segment before rolling it out across the board.

As smartphone and connected devices use continues to grow, companies have many opportunities available to them. If they can deliver a compelling and consistent customer experience interface across them all, they'll have already set themselves apart from their competitors.

Mobile-first might seem like a bold step. But it is demonstrably more than just a leap of faith.