Mobile Messaging Tactics Must Keep Channel and Audience in Mind

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According to a new eMarketer report, â€œMobile Messaging Trends: Tapping into SMS, Mobile Email and Push Notifications,â€• marketers are only sending mobile notices that are personally or contextually relevant.

Messaging is a reflexive behaviour among mobile users. Juniper Research estimates the number of mobile messages sent worldwide in 2012 totalled 14.7 trillion. The research firm forecasts that by 2017, the number will nearly double to 28.2 trillion. Juniperâ€™s estimate includes messages sent via SMS, MMS, IM, email, social media and RCS/RCS-e, which is an internet-based messaging service offered primarily by carriers in Europe to compete with over-the-top (non-carrier-based) instant messaging services. Marketers have a menu of mobile messaging channels to choose from when seeking out consumers. Survey data suggests of all the mobile channels, marketers rely most heavily on mobile email. For example, a May 2013 survey of 745 marketing professionals worldwide conducted by StrongView (formerly StrongMail) found that 49% of respondents used mobile email, compared with 38% who said they used SMS or MMS and 20% who cited push notifications. SMS and MMS are more likely to be used by marketers seeking immediacy and wide reach. As Philippe Poutonnet, director of marketing for mobile marketing agency Hipcricket, put it, â€œSMS gets straight to the point. Macyâ€™s can send out an SMS alert about a sale happening this weekend and create a sense of urgency [among shoppers].â€• In addition, the fact that consumers have opted in to receive such messages increases the likelihood they will open them quickly. Arguably, push notifications convey a similar sense of urgency, but the reach of push is limited to smart device users only. shopkick, an app that gives consumers rewards when they enter a store, uses push notifications in two waysâ€”to share important news with its entire base of users and to alert shoppers when they are in the vicinity of a retail store where they can earn â€œkicksâ€• (reward points). â€œOur push open rate is usually between 60% and 7 said Alexis Rask, vice president and general manager of brand partnerships at shopkick. â€œOn a day that we send a push notification, we typically see a 100% increase in app launches.â€• A study conducted by Urban Airship revealed equally positive results. A five-month analysis of 360 apps across a variety of categories conducted between May and September 2012 found apps that employed push notifications retained up to 100% more of their users compared with apps that had not used push notifications. Push technology has delivered marketers another channel as well: in-app messaging. As the name suggests, in-app messages are only seen when the app is open. In-app messaging is just beginning to emerge. But given the overall popularity of apps, more brands are likely to use this channel going forward.

At this point, industry best practices for mobile messaging are mostly limited to the mechanics of the individual channels. â€œThe mix [of channels] is going to be dependent on the specific brand and the relationship that brand has with the consumer,â€• said Michael Becker, managing director of North America for the MMA. The opportunity for success, however, lies in enabling customers to tailor the messages to their preferences and cleverly leveraging that personal information. â€œWhat marketers need to learn is how to avoid being interruptive and instead influence by adding value and utility [across channels].â€•