Leverage the App into a Customer Relationship

Mobility is changing the way businesses connect with customers. Now apps are proving to be the ideal tool for unleashing mobility's full power as a value creator.

Enterprise mobility is a broad term that encompasses the use of mobile technology in a business context. It includes people using mobile devices to complete business tasks out of the office and also embraces e-commerce. The full power of e-commerce is found in the ability to improve the customer experience and to increase revenues. The well-designed app is proving to be a true workhorse of customer engagement, revenue generation, conversion of browsers to buyers, and brand strengthening. It is easy to create an app, but there are a few principles to adhere to when moving into the world of e-commerce apps in order to fully leverage their ability to contribute to business success through customer relationship management.

More Than an App

Apps are rightfully earning a top position in e-commerce because they can reach the customer wherever the customer is located at the moment. Customers are relying more on their smartphones and tablets for doing business. The 2014 IBM Digital Analytics Benchmark study indicates remarkable growth in mobile traffic. On Thanksgiving Day 2014, mobile traffic was over half the (52.1 percent) of all online traffic. Mobile sales were 27.9 percent of all online sales. Customers are spending more time on their mobile devices, and apps can attract and drive them to the online or offline location where it is easy to buy products and services.

It is critical that app-using customers enjoy a quality customer experience. That means apps must be strategic and proactive if they are to accomplish goals. Here are some facts. First, customers are less likely each year to engage with an employee during the buying process. Second, buyers in B2B transactions are more likely to search out companies when they are ready to buy than to respond to marketing.

Engagement with Real Meaning in the App World

Delivering value through mobile apps equates to offering customer insights, better response time, and enhanced engagement. Too many businesses develop a collection of apps that do

not reflect a cohesive marketing strategy. The first principle of the enterprise app is to offer a consistent customer experience that recognizes the uniqueness of the customers. One of the simplest ways to find out what makes a good experience is to ask customers how they use the company's apps. Couple that outreach with analytics that identify shopping behaviors based on real activity.

Apps can establish tech-based relationships that deepen as customers interact with the business technology to satisfy their needs. Engagement is a process in which the ongoing experience between the customers and the company leads to the customers becoming committed to the company. A cohesive marketing strategy uses a consistent approach across the technology tools, like apps and websites. The apps need to meet a customer needs, but customers will only use the app if they believe it will lead to extra value from the experience.

Push And Not Just Pull

MyFitnessPal has a large set of apps, but each one is designed to satisfy a market segment among the larger customer base. There are apps for jobbers, bikers, walkers, weight loss, and so on, but they send a consistent message about fitness and health. The apps are key elements in consumer efforts to follow a healthier lifestyle, and MyFitnessPal demonstrates it cares about is customers through apps customized to the company's market segments. Over 65 million users take advantage of engagement and retention features like high functionality, rich features, and push notifications.

Customers stay connected with MyFitnessPal because they must regularly input information into tracking programs - food intake, minutes of exercise, pounds lost, and so on. They are engaged on a daily basis, and the company gets the added bonus of having access to a wealth of information about customer behaviors. Push notifications play an important role because they enable apps to send new messages or notifications to customers. The reminders are usually sent when the app has not been used for a period of time.

Other types of engagement strategies include loyalty programs in which customers earn points for making a mobile purchase, geo-fencing which uses GPS to identify push notifications to send based on the customer's location, discounts or promotions applicable when customers make a purchase initiated through an app, and so on.

Smooth Functioning Leads to Sale

Related to the engagement activities is the need to make apps fun and interesting while still serving a purpose. There are hundreds of ways to accomplish this, including free games,

interesting content, sharing relevant information updates, and especially creating a high quality app that consistently works.

The "interesting and fun" has a goal though. Enterprise apps are intended to generate sales. Research has shown that customers will only try apps a couple of times before giving up on them when they do not work right. The app needs to function smoothly, and especially during the shopping experience. The app should lead to the information customers need to make a buy decision. Approximately 80 percent of apps are used once, and that means lost business in many cases. Customers using the apps should find seamless interface between the app and the website, and the app and social media communities built outside the app. Companies with brick-and-mortar businesses can enable customers to check prices by using a mobile app that allows scanning for price checks.

Finally, when the customer is ready to buy, the business should be ready to make it easy to pay. One-touch payment is becoming the norm in the mobile industry. The business can develop their own payment system, like Amazon Payments, or connect with companies like PayPal which has an app for one-touch purchasing. Today there are a variety of payment options like the newest Apple Pay, a mobile wallet.

The most important point to keep in mind is that the app experience is a customer experience. The business operations need to support what the app promises. Technology has not changed the need to have quality customer service from the beginning to the end of each transaction, or the need to engage the customer. Selling is all about relationships, even if the relationship begins with a mobile phone.