



● B2B Marketers Coming To Grips With Mobile

By Giselle Abramovich | August 14, 2014

There's no denying that business-to-consumer brands, in many ways, have an easier time at digital marketing than do most business-to-business brands. Not that it's ever really easy, but B2C marketers normally have a more digitally engaged audience—one that is used to living in the digital world and actually expects to be addressed via digital channels over digital platforms.

No wonder, then, that B2C marketers are historically known for more cutting-edge strategies than their B2B counterparts.

This separation is no more apparent than in the mobile marketing arena. Mobile penetration has hit record heights, and, once again, B2Cs are more courageous and experimental.

But that might not last long. According to a recent [report by mobile marketing company Usablenet](#), B2B mobile Web traffic (10 percent of overall B2B online traffic) will soon push ahead of B2C mobile traffic (currently at 22 percent), forcing B2B marketers out of their shells. The study also found more than half (56 percent) of B2B customers read reviews on their mobile devices, and 50 percent compare features or prices.

Additionally, according to Ray Pun, senior product marketing manager for mobile solutions at Adobe (CMO.com's parent company), a Forrester report from earlier in the year found that 30 percent of IT buyers use a smartphone to conduct research, and 49 percent do their IT buying research on a tablet device.

"B2B is lagging B2C in terms of mobile marketing investment because the percentage of mobile traffic is less than B2C," Pun told CMO.com. "There is much room for improving mobile Web and app experiences."

Making The Case for Mobile

Indeed, mobile is a huge opportunity for B2B marketers, according to Christina "CK" Kerley, an innovation speaker and B2B mobile marketing specialist. "Mobile is a channel for enriching and increasing the efficacy of existing programs and creating altogether new programs that help customers do their jobs better and address customer pain points," she told CMO.com in an exclusive interview.

B2B sellers need to be on mobile because it's what their customers have come to expect, added Shehryar Khan, principal at Deloitte Consulting and mobile and Web offering lead for Deloitte Digital. They want to be able to conduct tasks anytime, anywhere, using the device of their choice in a contextually relevant manner, he said.

"With that in mind, when I put myself in the shoes of a B2B buyer, I would expect to be able to research products and view content about them on my mobile device. I should be able to review proposals on my mobile device," Khan told CMO.com in an exclusive interview. "I should be able to review a contract from a vendor via my phone. I should be able to review, modify, and negotiate pricing on mobile. If I have an existing relationship, I should be able to conveniently reorder from my mobile device. And, on the off chance that I do need to reach out to one of my suppliers, I would like to get proactively notified [via] a push notification."

Three forces are driving B2B professionals' use of mobile, according to Seth Pickett, senior director of global mobility and workplace practice in the enterprise services division of Hewlett-Packard. They are the workforce itself, the workplace, and work styles.

When you think about the workforce, Pickett explained, there's an increased expectation for productivity. In addition, the demographics are changing dramatically as Millennials start their first jobs. And, Pickett told CMO.com, even professionals who have been in the workforce for a number of years now are more comfortable with technology than they've historically been.

"All of a sudden, this new level of comfort by those in the workforce and the demands of advanced technology entering the workforce create quite a conundrum in the enterprise," Pickett told CMO.com.

The workplace has also changed, Pickett said. People are no longer stapled to their desks, with employees working in different offices worldwide, and some working remotely out of their homes. What they all have in common: their mobile devices. Large B2B enterprises are arming their employees with mobile devices, and that's a clear opportunity for B2B marketers, Pickett said.

The last driving force behind the growing adoption and reliance on mobile in the workforce, according to Pickett, is the fact that all professionals are also consumers. And just as they go into their personal email, for example, to check in with friends and family, the same "habits" are moving into the workplace.

"That trifecta of elements makes things interesting as it relates to how professionals conduct business," Pickett told CMO.com. "[B2B] companies need to be thinking about their mobile strategy."

Jeff Hasen, founder of mobile marketing consultancy Gotta Mobilize, agreed that mobile is increasingly important for B2B, but pointed out that B2B marketers have been slow to adopt. Hasen told CMO.com that B2B marketers lack mobile personalization strategies, intuitive navigation, and mobile-specific content, while many B2Cs have already mastered these areas.

"In general, the [B2C] consumer has more patience and can put up with a dose of irrelevant content," Hasen said. "Not so with the business target, who likely is time-challenged and unwilling to wade through an experience that brings no value or takes too long to deliver."

According to Kerley, in 2015 more B2B marketers will make mobile a priority in the marketing budget. By assessing current plans and finding ways to infuse mobile, Kerley explained, businesses will find they are able to cut costs in areas such as customer service and call center volume.

The “Golden Rule” in B2B mobile marketing is to focus on the buyer’s problems and identify ways to solve them, Hasen told CMO.com. Mobile lends itself really well to that, she said.

Kerley told CMO.com B2B marketers need to shift their mind-set from looking at mobile as a consumer media, when, in fact, it is the most “opportune, rich media they have ever been given,” she said. It is true that consumers are dependent on their devices for personal tasks; however, the smartphone is also the one device that every business professional must have to do their work effectively, she said.

B2B Mobile Challenges

According to Deloitte’s Khan, most B2B organizations have traditionally relied on in-person, high-touch sales team interaction to drive conversion. That still holds true, but it needs to be augmented by tools and digital experiences that accelerate that conversation.

“The B2C space is much more competitive than B2B,” Khan said. “The challenge that B2B is up against is the fact that, historically, they haven’t had to worry as much about digital engagement. Mobile has changed user expectations. As a result, B2B companies have to re-evaluate how to effectively and seamlessly engage with their current or prospective customers along every step of the customer journey.”

When it comes to the B2B customer journey, mobile is now playing a big role in the awareness stage. Mobile search, mobile ads, and such have become the first touch that a professional has with a company, according to Thomas Mueller, chief experience officer at B2B agency Siegel+Gale. Mobile plays an important role in lead generation and other portions of the consideration stage as well, he said.

“The biggest challenge for B2B marketers is they are so far behind in mobile from B2C,” Mueller told CMO.com. “They’re behind even in the basics, like optimizing sites for responsive design.”

That’s bad news for B2B, Mueller explained, because Google penalizes sites that do not opt for responsive Web design. Good content won’t suffice anymore. It’s now about overall site quality, which is where mobile plays a role.

“When you think about big B2B enterprises vs. smaller B2B startups, the startups have a substantial advantage because they started with a mobile-first proposition,” Mueller said. “They don’t need to force mobile into their legacy models. It’s the big B2B corporations that are playing catch-up in mobile.”

Another big challenge Mueller said he sees, especially with mobile playing a big role at the top of the B2B funnel (branding, awareness, and lead generation), is few chances for B2Bs to make a good impression. “If you mess up that first interaction on mobile, they aren’t coming back because you’ve already failed on your brand promise,” he said.

Marketers also have been using mobile-optimized content to drive purchase intent and aid with the research phase in the B2B buyer’s journey. And once a sale is closed, B2B sellers have been relying on mobile at the bottom of the funnel to grow loyalty and repurchase intent. The post-purchase phase has mainly been for native apps meant to grow the relationship between buyer and seller, Mueller explained.

“Mobile plays a role in all parts of the funnel, but it’s a very different use case in each phase, as the business customer is in different modes,” Mueller told CMO.com. He also said the mobile tactics and programs for each part of the funnel will differ for every marketer.

According to HP’s Pickett, B2B buyers do transact on mobile; however, because B2B is known for larger buys in terms of spend, right now mobile is primarily used to encourage purchase intent.

Another driver of mobile adoption in the workplace is the fact that enterprises are building mobile applications and services for their employees, said James “Coop” Cooper, chief technologist of the mobility and workplace global practice at HP. This, in effect, means professionals have to use their devices for work-related purposes more often. It is no longer an option.

The iOS and Android operating systems have experienced large-scale adoption, Cooper said. “iOS and Android share a lot of things in common, such as HTML5,” Cooper said. “That means we can start to develop apps without that fear that we’ll be rewriting it for different device capabilities.”

Tips For Success

Deloitte’s Khan said that B2B needs to draw inspiration from B2C on effective mobile strategy. His advice is to take a user-centric design process for any mobile initiative; understanding the life and habits of the prospective buyer is imperative. The first step in gaining that understanding is mapping out the customer journey, he said.

“Understand the day-to-day life of prospective buyers,” Khan told CMO.com. “You have to know what they do, how they work, and what keeps them up at night. Then, identify where mobile can make that journey more efficient, effective, and more accessible. And last—but just as important—is ensuring you have all the back-end enabling systems, like a good CRM system, in place to make that happen.”

The complexity and longer lead time of the B2B sales cycle makes it difficult for many B2B companies to figure out which mobile tactics or programs to rely on and when. Mueller warned against using the same content from the Web on mobile.

Mobile can’t be an exact replica of the online experience, Kerley agreed. For example, e-books are a welcome form of content in B2B, but they’re long, and not a good fit for mobile, she said. Creating a video series highlighting the main points of an e-book is one tactic to turn existing online assets into a mobile-friendly message. Another tip is to add a mobile component, such as QR codes, to all print collateral to effectively digitize static media.

B2B must think about how content marketing can become “mobile-first,” Adobe’s Pun added. One example from inside Adobe, he said, is the [CMO.com app for iOS devices](#), which is truly a mobile-optimized experience rather than an exact replica of the CMO.com Web experience. In addition, Pun said B2B marketers should ensure their social media pages provide links to mobile-friendly content pages.

According to Gotta Mobilize’s Hasen, no matter the mobile form factor, always remember time is of the essence for B2B. “If you ask for six or more clicks in a B2B marketing campaign, you might as well put the campaign in the ‘failure’ category,” Hasen told CMO.com. “Make it easy, safe, and quick. Or don’t even try.”

At the end of the day, Kerley told CMO.com, mobile is a gateway for B2B to solve customer problems. The mobile revolution is not about devices—it is about behaviors.

“As B2Bs, we want to help customers do their jobs better,” Kerley said. “You have to understand behaviors if you’re going to provide any real value.”