Mobile marketing: Responsive website or app?

Up to 58 percent of smartphone users have shopped with their phone at some point, making the mobile market a force that cannot be ignored.



February 24, 2016

In Japan and the United States, more than half of all information searches and online shopping is done with mobile devices. With figures such as these, developing websites and

©IESE Business School

applications for these devices is fundamental to any digital marketing strategy.

Choosing between an optimized website and an app depends on many factors. But a new paper by IESE's **Mario Capizzani**, with Neeti Bhargava, Xavier Cañigueral and Shruti Chaudhry suggests that it rarely makes sense to create an app if it is not preceded by a mobile website.

Many more people use the search function on their mobile devices than download apps. And in most cases, a user will only download an app after they have already spent some time on the website.

Responsive websites

A mobile website is one that is optimized to be viewed on a smartphone, tablet or other mobile device. This programing allows content to adapt or adjust to suit the device in question, leading to a more positive experience for that user.

In fact, polls show that 30 percent of people who attempt to use their cell phone to make a purchase give up if the transaction is not optimized for their device.

Capizzani and co-authors outline the key features needed to optimize a user's experience when navigating on a mobile website.

- **Home page and site navigation**. The website must load quickly and feature simple, vertical navigation. Also important: easy access to the home page, short menus and clear call-to-action buttons.
- **Search**. As with a desktop site, users want search boxes that are easily visible. Smart search features such as auto-complete and corrected misspellings must be considered.
- **Usability and content**. It is necessary to create designs and content adapted to different kinds of screen, with automatic number pads and calendars for filling out forms. Maps and other geolocation tools are also helpful.
- **Commerce and conversions**. Users must be able to navigate without having to register, communicate easily via email or phone options, and connect to social media if they want to share content.

©IESE Business School

Mobile applications

In general, apps should be an extension of a company's digital strategy, one step forward from the mobile-responsive website. Their purpose is to serve people who already know the brand and want an easier and more personalized transaction.

These programs are a quick, direct and accessible way to communicate and build customer loyalty. But it is a good idea not to overdo it.

Aside from ensuring privacy and secure data, apps should provide additional features above and beyond those of a mobile website.

- **Geolocation**. This features allows the company to know where the consumer is at any given time, and also offers the customer a range of complementary services. Beacons to locate stores and products are among them.
- **User customization**. Apps let users customize and adapt them to their interests, including changing graphic and design options to make recurring tasks easier.
- **Integration with other devices or apps**. Apps offer greater integration with other functions or programs on the device, such as the calendar, camera or bar code scanner, broadening the range of actions open to users.
- **Offline capabilities**. A company has to consider how to build in content or interactivity that does not rely on a wireless signal. One example is d ownloading a catalogue that can be viewed offline.
- **Be consistent**. Features that are present on a brand's webpage should also be present in the app, so as not to wrong-foot users who are familiar with the earlier version.
- **Feedback**. There must be an obvious and easy-to-use system for reporting errors and sending suggestions and criticism.
- **Gamification**. When users can interact and have fun while using the app, it improves and enhances their experience.

There are endless benefits to having a window to the online world, be it through an optimized website or an app. But the real challenge for companies is to integrate their channels — offline and online.

©IESE Business School

And when it comes to content and user experience, the most important thing is to keep them consistent and satisfactory across all marketing tools and platforms. Done well, this tends to make loyal customers even more loyal and can convert them into voluntary brand ambassadors.

www.iese.edu/insight

©IESE Business School