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the unified

mobile strategy



The unified mobile strategy

Mobile is rapidly establishing itself as a significant channel to market. Businesses with serious plans for the future can't afford to ignore it, and they need to think strategically about how to make mobile work for them. In essence, a mobile strategy should be a fully-integrated, thoroughly thought-out map for mobile engagement, focused on achieving specific goals. Done properly, it will touch every aspect of a business, including existing channels.

Why it's important

Emerging technologies bring many things with them – excitement, a high degree of interest from the media, an opportunity to pioneer new ways to promote products and services. But they also bring uncertainty, a lack of structure, limited or no measurable results and a desire to claim a piece of this new space at any cost, resulting in any number of individuals declaring that their 'expertise' is available to businesses at a price. Taking the time to step back, gain some perspective and consider what the fundamental benefits are to your business can mean the difference between long-term success and short-term, short-lived space grabbing.

Applying the disciplines needed to develop a robust strategy for mobile pays off in a number of ways:

- The mobile landscape is constantly evolving. Your strategy will go a long way to ensuring that you are able to keep up with and exploit the developments as they happen.
- Any uncertainty and confusion surrounding mobile and how it can be applied in a business context will be mitigated as control and structure are imposed on the process of mobile engagement.
- The fragmented nature of the mobile channel – multiple platforms, a variety of ways for delivering brand messages – means that strategy has a vital role to play in providing cohesion and a clear path to mobile engagement which truly achieves specified business aims.
- Your strategy will provide a method for measurement, which should allow for reliable analysis of mobile's financial contribution to your bottom line.
- Having a strategy will ensure that you can maintain brand integrity – properly-considered activities are far more likely to enhance brand perception than rushed decisions based on a desire to 'not miss the boat'.
- Not having a strategy or failing to give it proper time, resource and attention can lead to loss of user trust and engagement. Getting it wrong this early in the game may lead customers to believe that the brand doesn't really understand mobile or their lifestyle in general and jump ship to a competitor who does.

As an illustration, a well-known chain of restaurants in the US developed an iPhone app without any kind of strategy for providing either the customer or the business with worthwhile results. The app simply allowed users to flamegrill a virtual steak – there was no restaurant locator, call to action or even a link back to the website. It did offer a '3D experience', provided the user had a pair of 3D glasses readily available. As a result, potential and existing customers had no way to turn their mobile experience into a dining experience, feedback was broadly negative and the app was rapidly withdrawn. The business itself suffered, not only because of the time and money invested in an app which was unable to drive footfall to its outlets, but also because it rapidly became an example of 'how not to do it', which damaged the brand.

What a good strategy considers

Your unified mobile strategy will cover a number of areas:

Analysing the marketplace

One of the fundamental first steps to building a mobile strategy is to have a close look at the marketplace – what does a typical mobile user look like, what mobile platforms do they use, what is their current user experience and what do they expect from mobile services? And, vitally, what is your competition doing and can you identify ways to differentiate?

Setting objectives

Your strategy will not work if you don't establish clear objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) at the start of the process. Deciding on your primary aim – awareness, sales, engagement, efficiency – will have a significant impact on the route you choose. Mobile can offer unique functionality and opportunities for securing and retaining customers – but it is not a marketing or distribution cure-all, and the strategy should fully take this into consideration.

Defining the product to meet your objectives

Once the objectives are clear, you can start to define what kind of product will meet them. Examining how customers are currently using your products or service, your business infrastructure and ways to adapt your product for mobile will provide the context for an application definition statement, which should also give room for breaking new ground using the qualities unique to mobile as a channel.

Creating a mobile brand

It's important for brands to adapt to the nature of mobile and the way users interact with services – screen size, time and frequency of engagement, customer expectations all have an impact on the way branding works and how mobile integrates with the overall brand story.

Choosing a platform

There are a number of factors to consider when selecting a mobile platform – and the pros and cons have caused a great deal of debate. Is it best to focus on mobile web or applications? Will your product work on iPhone, Android, Blackberry or all three (or none)? And how will your choice of content and customer base dictate your choice of platform?

User experience

Users have come to expect a specific user experience from mobile, and it's vital to consider how they will feel, how they will act and if they will be encouraged to make repeat visits/purchases when using your mobile product. Analysing user behaviour and applying basic rules for best practice will ensure that user experience is appropriate, consistent and, above all, delivers the required results.

Delivering the product

Given the growth of mobile and its increasing importance as a channel to market, there is an understandable desire to launch mobile products speedily, and while this is not necessarily a recipe for failure (there are advantages to beating the competition with, say, a mobile shopping app, as Ocado discovered), the emphasis should always be on ensuring mobile can integrate easily and securely with your primary channels. The physical development of your mobile product will require specific skillsets, and part of your strategy should be where these will be sourced from – in-house or third party? And, as mobile in its current incarnation is relatively new and untested, how will you deal with any issues which may occur?

Releasing the product

A mobile product will have to meet a range of requirements before launch, including (for applications) app store approval, and integration with other marketing initiatives as part of an overall marketing strategy. The mobile strategy should also consider how to publicise the release as well as how to make best use of online rankings and reviews.

Monitoring and maintenance

Successful mobile strategies recognise that simply launching an app or mobile site isn't enough – the mobile product needs to be monitored, maintained, fixed if necessary and regularly updated if it is to continue to engage customers. Scheduled measurement against original objectives and KPIs will ensure that the mobile strategy stays on track and delivers the required results.

Who owns your unified mobile strategy?

Strategies that work long-term have one overriding distinction over those that don't – they have a specific owner in a specific area of the business with responsibility for ensuring that it is kept 'live'. There are no hard and fast rules over where the strategy should sit and who the owner should be - business decision makers simply need to have a clear idea of which area is likely to gain most from mobile and, as a result, will be a driving force behind the strategy.

Should the owner be:

- Marketing? This would make sense if the overall objectives involve brand awareness and customer acquisition.
 - Operations? This may work if the aim is efficiency or process development, perhaps in a B2B environment.
 - Sales? This may be appropriate if the objective is solely to increase sales figures.
 - eCommerce? If the objective is to increase eCommerce or complement online sales, this might be the right place for strategy ownership.
 - A specific mobile team/task force? The growth and proliferation of mobile is unlikely to slow down, and in all probability most medium to large businesses will need a specific team within the next five years, so it may be right to start the ball rolling now.
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Why not IT?

Businesses are often tempted to give ownership of all things technical to IT – whatever their aims or objectives might be. However, in much the same way as it wouldn't necessarily be wise to let IT manage your eCommerce site, this may not be the best option from a mobile perspective. It is unlikely to bring material benefits to the IT team, and may well be considered just one more part of the infrastructure that needs supporting rather than driving forward. This is why it is important for the strategy to identify mobile as a channel to market rather than a piece of technology – it ensures that ownership reflects objectives.

Avoiding bad strategy

Knowing what a bad strategy looks like goes a long way towards helping businesses to avoid potential pitfalls. There are several key errors to watch for:

- **Starting with a tactic already in mind** – for example, building an entire strategy around an iPhone app for no other reason than they are what's hot and the CEO wants the business to have one – rather than analysing what will bring the best results.
- **Unrealistic timescales** – at a time when there's little or no competition, it can be advantageous to deliver an innovative product quickly, even if it has rough edges. However, the general rules apply – before even considering what mobile product to develop, know your market, know your infrastructure and know the capabilities of your business and the people involved in design and build. You may only have one opportunity to deliver a successful mobile product, so it pays to take a little extra time to ensure it is built on solid business foundations. Businesses who fail to do this can permanently damage their brand.
- **Expecting too much of existing web agencies** – good agencies have recognised the importance of mobile and they are creating specific teams to build their portfolio of mobile channel experience. And, while your existing agency should always strive to provide you with the services you need, it would be wrong to simply assume that they would be able to deliver a mobile product. Mobile is an emerging channel – it makes sense to invite agencies to pitch for your business, and to buy in experience if necessary.
- **Working in isolation** – a successful mobile strategy should involve all areas of the business – marketing, infrastructure, operations. If it doesn't, it is unlikely to be able to stand on its own beyond any initial campaigns or activities, as these will not feed into or be supported by the business as a whole. It is important to include all affected parties in the planning process, so that the internal constraints and requirements are properly understood before the project begins. This need not mean involving everyone in every step of the process - in fact efforts should be made to prevent design by committee. Successful mobile strategies require strong vision, but understanding what is required from the business to deliver this vision is vital.
- **Leaving the customer out of the equation** – disregarding your customers' behaviour, needs and aspirations can lead to brand failure and, potentially, business failure. If 90% of your customers use a Blackberry and you opt for an iPhone app, your uptake may not be what you expected. If you develop a strategy that does not take into account the opinions and sensibilities of a significant portion of your customer base, you could be faced with lasting brand damage. For example, a soft drinks giant made a very costly mistake when it launched an iPhone app to promote an energy drink. Aimed at young men, the app divided women into categories and suggested lines of conversation which were at best inappropriate and at worst offensive. Millions of female customers were alienated, and a campaign was rapidly set up encouraging women to drink a rival brand instead.
- **Sacrificing ROI for gimmicks** – it is possible for businesses to make quick wins by releasing mobile products which are standalone and do little other than promote the brand name (for example, the Barclaycard Waterslide Extreme app). Generally, however, customers expect more than just impressive graphics, and it benefits both the business and the customer if a mobile product provides more than this – at the very least a call to action, or a store location service. Mobile as a channel is expected to allow the user to perform some kind of useful task, so businesses are taking a risk by developing purely promotional apps. And mobile is still at a stage where it has to prove itself, so applications which allow for measurement of response will enable you to demonstrate its worth in financial terms.
- **Becoming too dependent on one provider** – a mobile strategy needs to be solid enough to withstand change, and given the speed at which the market is evolving, relying on any one provider for all future mobile activity could prove to be unwise. For example, if the iPhone app store was suddenly unavailable to you, the work already carried out (design, development, infrastructure etc) should be flexible enough to be portable to other platforms such as Android and Blackberry.

Analysing the marketplace

According to ComScore, there are currently around 70 million smartphone users across mainland Europe – a year-on-year increase of 41%. And the Internet Advertising Bureau's (IAB) research shows that 51% (around 23 million) of mobile users in the UK are actively researching products, looking for stores and making purchases.

So the raw data illustrates the immense size and potential of the market as a whole – and profiling these users, how they behave and how they are likely to engage with your brand will inform your strategy and give it a customer focus, which, as discussed above, is a major key to success.

Who uses mobile?

According to US market researchers The Nielsen Company, smartphone users are:

- More likely to be male than female (54/46% split)
- Aged under 35
- Educated and more wealthy than average, with 34% of all smartphone users earning £60,000+
- Loyal to their platform providers – 80% of iPhone users would choose another iPhone for their next mobile purchase, and the figure is 70% for Android.

When it comes to spending patterns, the IAB's figures show just how comfortable users are with making purchases either through a mobile app or website:

- 40% of users reach for their mobile when they see an advert they like on television
- 27% say that mobile is the first choice of media when they want to access content
- 27% of those surveyed have used mobile to purchase via cards, bank details or PayPal
- £12.20 is spent on a mobile purchase each time
- 42% of users who made a purchase on mobile did so because they felt it was the easiest option
- 31% of those surveyed made purchases spontaneously
- 25% enjoyed the novelty and experimental aspects of purchasing via their mobile phone

Given the evidence from research and a number of anecdotal factors which appear to back up the statistics, it's possible to paint a broad-brush picture of a commercially-active mobile user. They are:

Affluent and technically aware – they are willing to invest money in the latest phone technology, they trust mobile as a platform for product research and purchase, and can be equally as happy to buy via their mobile as they are online.

Inclined to see their mobile as a lifestyle facilitator - accustomed to being able to access the information they need whenever they need it, they use their mobiles to remove traditional barriers to service such as being on the move, having no access to a PC etc. And they are just as likely to use mobile services in their own homes as when they are commuting or out with friends – Tesco recently carried out research which highlighted the fact that 50% of the mobile shoppers surveyed made their purchases while sitting at home watching TV. Convenience (mobile phones are almost always carried with the user, are always on, and buying via mobile can be fitted in easily around other household activities) and functionality (mobile sites and apps that offer an experience as streamlined as their online equivalent) play a large part in the increase in this type of purchasing behaviour.

Sociable, with a tendency to express polarised opinions – mobile users will share what they think – good or bad – with other users via social networks, communities and reviews. This can lead to a small number of vocal customers having a disproportionate effect on market opinion.

Expecting apps and websites to deliver what they promise – as with all new technologies, early adopters tend to be relatively forgiving, provided their expectations have been managed effectively. The novelty of the platform is generally enough to make up for its restricted (but growing) ability. For example, Facebook users are content with the reduced functionality offered by its iPhone app, because it works well and provides them with the core features they need to use Facebook whenever they choose to. Apps and mobile websites which over-promise and fail to meet user expectations are likely to be on the receiving end of the wrath of the vocal minority mentioned above. The key message is: Do a few things well, not many things poorly.

Comparison shoppers – consumers as a whole have become accustomed to comparing prices, and a number of businesses have built this into their strategies. Supermarkets, for example, regularly advertise the fact that they charge less than their competitors. Having the ability to access this kind of information on a mobile device enables customers to not only carry out a ‘live’ comparison at the point of purchase, but also locate a cheaper store using the built-in GPS facility – and this will undoubtedly have an effect on the way retailers set their prices in the future.

Heavily reliant on their mobile phones – the functions available on today’s mobile phones have caused users to change their behaviour. For example, a significant number of people now depend entirely on their phone’s GPS to tell them where they are or how to find a location – so much so that if their phone were to fail, they would be lost, quite literally.

A captive audience – users tend to be very loyal, and as a rule are open and accepting of any new product or service offered via their chosen mobile platform. They are also willing to pay – particularly iPhone users who are accustomed to buying apps – though they will demand value for money. After all, equivalent web content often is available free of charge.

Where are your customers?

While this general market information is useful in the initial stages of formulating your strategy, it is essential to research your existing customer base to find out how they use mobile.

Ask the basic questions:

Do they use mobile to access information on a regular basis? If the answer is ‘no’, it may be worth reconsidering your strategy and instead planning for a few years in the future, when mobile uptake will have increased.

What platform does the majority of your customers use? Do they use iPhones? Android? Blackberry? This will inform your development process and provide focus for your strategy.

How many of your customers make purchases via mobile, or try to make purchases and are put off, and has this figure grown over the last 12 months? If the numbers are significant, the business case for mobile requires no further proof.

How do customers use your service? Your approach to development will be affected by whether they are carrying out a small number of transactions on a regular basis (ordering groceries for delivery, for example) or making purchases over a longer length of time (booking an annual holiday or buying seasonal items such as Christmas decorations). Each will potentially have a mobile solution but require different tactics.

Is there a locational aspect to your business? Mobile is ideally placed to fill the ‘gap’ between users leaving home and arriving at their destination, which is why travel services such as ‘live’ departure boards and store location finders have proved so popular. The answers to these questions should enable you to develop a convincing customer usage case, tracking their potential use of your product or service from initial engagement through to purchase.

What do your customers want from mobile?

Business strategies tend to fail if they focus on what the business thinks customers should have, rather than what those customers actually need or would find useful. Before considering how to deliver a mobile product to potential and existing customers, take the time to distil what you want to offer into two or three basic elements. For example, a pet food delivery store might want to:

- Enable customers to browse products
- Allow them to place and pay for an order
- Offer delivery tracking

These fundamental services are clear, concise and will offer measurable benefits to customers. Avoiding the temptation at this stage to add in ‘extras’ such as pet care tips, games and competitions (though these might well play their part in mobile campaigns for businesses with different goals) will ensure that the mobile product will meet business objectives. The strategy will have a practical focus on developing a small number of useful services well, which should work efficiently whenever customers want to use them.

However, asking customers what they want is not always advisable – they are likely to have an extensive ‘shopping list’ which may not be achievable in a single mobile product, or at the other end of the scale, may not realise what mobile is capable of doing for them. The best approach is to specify a product and outline its features, then ask for feedback. This benefits the business, because customer needs will be met, and the customer, because they will have had input into the end product.

What is your competition doing?

As mobile is still a relatively new channel, businesses in some industries may be in the fortunate position where there is little or no competition. However, the figures show that mobile cannot be ignored, and most businesses with long-term goals will be, at the very least, considering how to move into the mobile space.

Part of your mobile strategy should be to analyse what your competitors offer and identify how you may be able to either differentiate or do it better.

Performance is everything

It is vital to remember that, when it comes to mobile products, brand takes second place to service. Offering an efficient, straightforward mobile product which works every time will attract users away from their preferred brands, even if the name above the shop is unfamiliar.

Mobile users make their decisions based on what works best, whether it’s a big brand or a relative unknown, so the opportunity exists to ‘build a better mousetrap’ – a mobile product which performs better than the competition and as a result encourages users to switch allegiance.

About this excerpt

Authored by Red Ant’s Director of Mobile Dan Hartveld and Mobile Product Manager Alex Sbardella, ‘The Unified Mobile Strategy’ is part of a comprehensive white paper covering all aspects of mobile, from analysing the landscape to choosing a platform, developing a product and marketing it successfully.

About Red Ant Mobile

Red Ant Mobile enables businesses to take full advantage of the rapidly evolving mobile market. We provide a full range of services from expert advice on mobile strategy to the development and delivery of custom mobile applications, from small promotional tools to fully-fledged retail and social experiences.

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If you would like to talk further about planning a mobile strategy, or require Red Ant to help you along this path please feel free to contact us on:

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