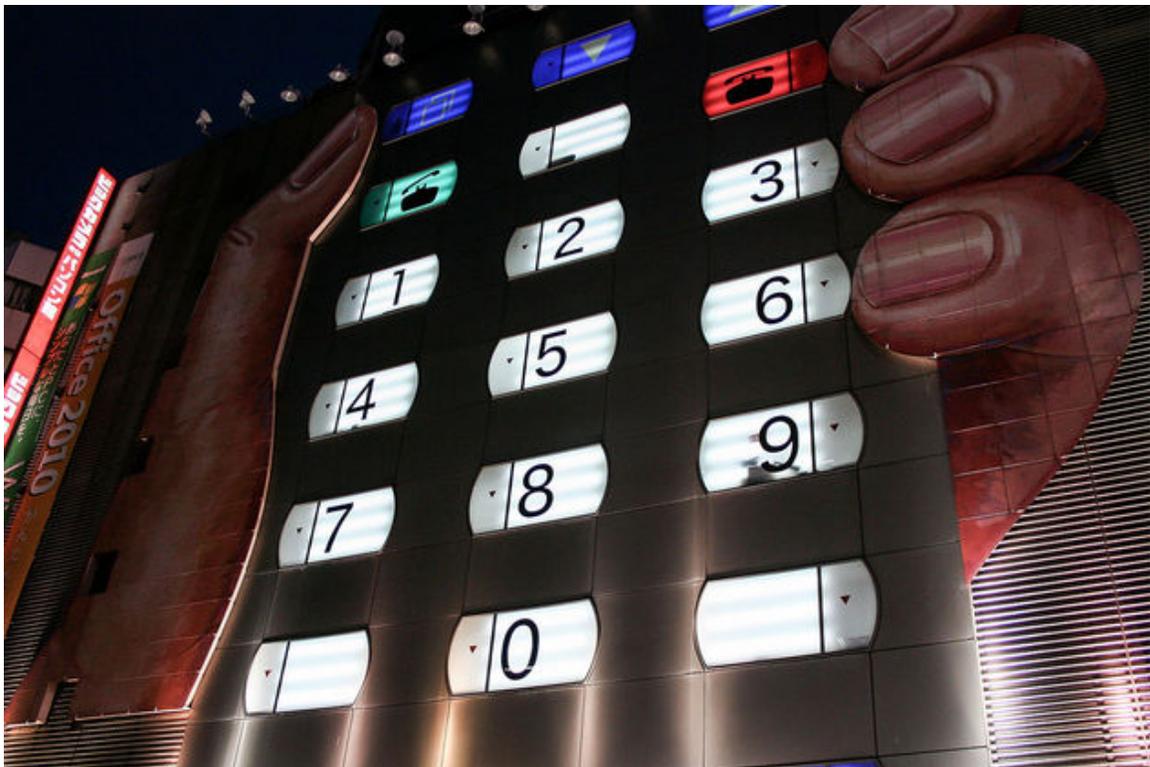


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Advice

Six Mobile Marketing Tips for Small Businesses

By Karen E. Klein | December 17, 2014



Mobile phones are essential to shopping these days, and a majority of cell phone owners say they're willing to share personal data with merchants in exchange for such things as coupons and discounts.

But navigating mobile marketing can be confusing for small business owners, who must avoid bombarding people with unwanted texts while they're slogging through crowds of holiday shoppers. So how can local merchants use mobile marketing effectively? Here are six tips.

Focus on customers. Consider how consumers already interact with their mobile devices and take advantage of that behavior. Eliminate anything that makes buying more difficult, such as a website that doesn't load correctly on a mobile device or hard-to-find contact information. Optimize your customers' mobile Web experiences by adding "click to call" and "click for directions" features, suggests Jeff Fagel, chief marketing officer at G/O Digital. Make sure all your marketing messages look great on the small

screens where people are increasingly opening them, says Jessica Stephens, chief marketing officer at marketing technology company SmartFocus. She says 30 percent of mobile shoppers abandon transactions that aren't optimized for mobile and 57 percent abandon sites that take more than three seconds to load.

Don't get too pushy. Most Internet shopping activity involves consumers actively searching out information on services or products. But mobile marketing is what's called "push" technology, which involves sending unsolicited messages to would-be customers. "It's all done with the idea of engaging customers and getting them to spread your offers on social media," says Betsy Page Sigman, who teaches operations and information management at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. "If people buy something every time you send a discount, keep sending them. But pay attention to when they stop, because that data tells you a lot, too."

Respect privacy. The discovery of a series of ad beacons used to track phones in New York City recently caused a ruckus over privacy concerns. You won't catch people by surprise if you direct your marketing messages to customers who have agreed to receive texted discounts or coupons or who have downloaded an app such as Shopkick. The application, and others like it, allows merchants to send messages to users' devices when their location service is turned on, showing they are nearby.

Give something away. Most people don't mind that their supermarket tracks their purchases—as long as they get discounts when they swipe their reward cards. The same idea applies to mobile marketing: You need to sweeten the deal, not just text annoying ads. Send customers special offers, reminders about sales, and discount coupons. Imagine the response to a "free coffee with purchase" offer you send to shoppers a block away from your bakery at 4 p.m., for instance.

Integrate. Mobile marketing should be part of your overall marketing plan, along with e-mail, direct mail, and other advertising, says John McGee, chief executive of OptifiNow, a Los Angeles sales and marketing company. "Track the results you get from each channel and see which one is working. There's no silver bullet—you need to do a little bit of everything. And remember, it doesn't matter what you want to do—it's what your customers like," he says.

Be concise. Unlike e-mail, text messages have a high open rate. But you have to get your point across in few words, which is easier to do the better you know your customers. "Text messages work better for local marketing, which lends itself to small business," McGee says. "If a local restaurant is having a slow night and sends text to people nearby to get them in for a special, that's more effective than a retail chain sending out messages to people 20 miles down the freeway."