

CONSIDERING Commerce? “e” or “m” (it really is becoming one in the same)



By John Molinaro | October 20, 2013

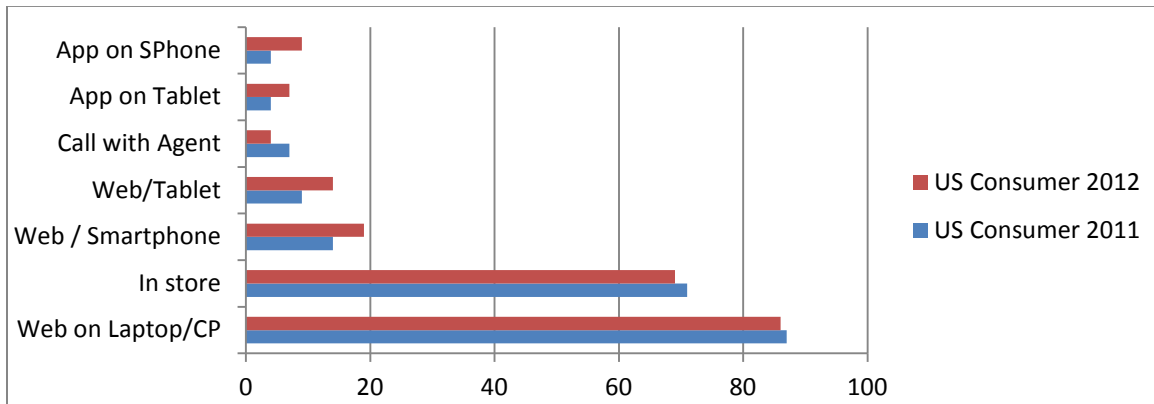
One can hardly consider doing any ecommerce initiative without considering mobile. Your smart phone is more than a browser, it's the POS, the Credit Card, the Identity Authorization vehicle, it's the consumer's common unified communications vehicle. Companies that have a very robust website and e-Commerce platform find themselves with a lackluster m-Commerce Platform. They find themselves piecing together a layer for their m-Commerce. With this in mind I will point out a few mCommerce best practices. We, at Sterlite Software USA, can perform a quick inexpensive assessment for how to improve and ready your commerce platform for a robust and shifting consumer profile with real preference toward how people are using their mobile devices to search and purchase products.

1. **Build applications that customers can use for more than shopping.** The most successful mobile applications are entertaining, build brand awareness, lead to shopping, and possibly educate. If a customer wants to shop they will use the mobile browser to buy, or research, why create a mobile app that only does shopping build one that also provides an experience. A great example would be the home improvement center having the self-help video's available on how to install a new faucet. If I buy one, I can view what I'm doing wrong if things are not going well. If I am considering one, I can understand how long it might take to install, what other things to buy such as silicon tape or whatever, and how to pick the faucet that is easiest to install; locking in my buy online and simply picking up my order. Mobile video, game-ification, or other interface makes for an m-Commerce place to visit when buying or thinking to buy.
2. **Target which mobile devices you support in your mobile strategy.** Yes b2c companies have a major problem with this, the types of mobile devices are vast. Targeting your strategy to support the mobile devices you pick is important. You need to make a choice as the vast number of devices and standards they support will or can bury some companies in development costs just to support the various standards.
3. **Connect your mobile and social strategies.** This year most internet time was spent via mobile access and a huge amount of that time was connected with social sites and services. Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Ning, LinkedIn, and others all have integrations to both your website and mobile. Be sure to have consistency in message, look, feel and strategy for online and mobile, as well as social.
4. **Design your site with Mobile aspects of the Commerce experience in mind.** To effectively manage eCommerce and mCommerce on one site, consider some minimalistic approaches to XHTML site structure and arrange the site in a way in which it would make sense to read from top to bottom (not necessarily side to side) . Technically changes can be made with CSS, or javascript to modify interface layer behavior verses the XHTML a (KISS Keep-It-Simple S approach) works best.



5. **Selection of a Commerce platform** with a major vendor supporting Mobile as well as desktop experiences. Several of the smaller vendors have a fragmented approach to support mobile commerce. Vendors like Oracle are well suited to supporting the Mobile needs for your business' commerce capabilities. Here Sterlite has not only helped companies understand the strengths and weaknesses but it's also critical to understand in the selection and implementation on the selected platform, how to maximize the "OOTB" capabilities and how and when to customize. All to many companies customize themselves into a world of complexity and costly operational maintenance because they didn't understand the OOTB capabilities. This is a specialty service of ours' and this has long term benefit not only with maintenance but agility and flexibility enhancements.
6. **Allowing customers to manage their accounts via mobile device.** The customized experience is real and a loyalty builder, some of the newest customers (young or old) may never intend to use a desktop platform. And managing an account, preference settings are an impulse action to make their experience more intuitive and better for them thus pacification of the impulse will build loyalty and appreciation of your brand.
7. **Security is good, and spam is not.** Security is a must and you must ensure a secure mobile interaction with customer authentication and fraud detection as a minimal level of service provided. Also avoiding SMS spam and protecting the customer against SMS malware are basic level of MUST do's for the m-Commerce and customer.
8. **Non-invasive promotional campaigns,** also limit the generic mobile campaign. Annoying untargeted mobile ads destroy customer trust and respect, a simple question like "we have something special to share with you Mr. Customer click Y to receive our Mobile Special especially for you or ignore this message to not receive any of our specials targeted for you individually".
9. **Integration of GPS technologies.** Leverage proximity data in real-time to present valuable services, and alert customers where fitting. Finding your store, or finding and simplification of finding an item within the store on their mobile device can be an awesome experience. Also, alerting them about coupons or special offers as they walk in. What could be more compelling than notifying a customer that their favorite brand of something they bought here 2 times before is on sale as they walk into your facility? And that you can provide directions within the store to the location of that item.
10. **Multi-Channel Marketing.** Creating a coordinated multi-channel marketing plan, and anticipating mutually supportive customer interactions is key. Planning for and building a value-added service for many customer scenarios that intermingle multiple marketing channels reminds the customer why they are doing business with you and makes for loyalty and a favorite buying experience.
11. **Provide customers with Multi payment methods.** Offering m-wallets, stored value accounts and prepaid with option of automatic, or instant replenishment are becoming normal and expected by the mobile consumer in general. Mobile apps downloads were an estimated 6.5 B in 2010, and over 14B in 2012.

In summary the M-Commerce Strategy is a part of the other strategic pieces of the business. It must dovetail, intertwine, and or possibly overarch other strategies, Incorporating M-Commerce as the new lead of direction and consumer channel is the correct movement for most corporations. Consider the buying trends of the US consumer and a recent survey on their preferred shopping methods:



The consumer is making the move and for companies making the move can be seen as either overly simplistic or overly involved. The reality is most internal teams are not skilled as designers and developers for the m-Commerce channel, although most are familiar as consumers in the M-Commerce space, do not confuse this confidence with experience necessary to lead your firm in the technical aspects of creating a true strategically aligned M-Commerce platforms. To further show the impact of a robust M-Commerce platform a few demonstrative companies below have seen some substantial growth in the Business due to their strategic efforts and investments regarding the “M” in commerce are:

Amazon: (Amazon UK saw 0% growth on traditional web commerce platform sales while experiencing an 87% growth in sales on their M-Commerce channel).

Apple.com (Apple saw a modest 6% growth on their website sales from PC’s and Laptops, but a 75% growth on sales on their mobile channel’s).

Tesco Stores (Tesco saw a nice 18% growth on their web site sales from PC/Laptops, and a whopping 49% growth in sales via their mobile channel).

In the UK Dixons Retail Ptc. (Investment resulted in a solid 18% growth for the website sales via PC or laptop and their mobile commerce platform grew 88% in net sales).

M-Commerce is what your customer’s will expect; general adoption is growing, as well are the standards, services, and expectations, all of which are all evolving and maturing at a rapid pace. Your company’s near term health will depend on how well you support and provision for M-Commerce. Are you ready? Contact us if you have a need we will be happy to help.



About the Author: John Molinaro is a career technologist and business leader. Throughout his career, John has blended together business needs and technological innovation, resulting in numerous innovations and industry firsts innovating and creating competitive advantage. His eCommerce experience started in the ‘90s while working for Netscape Communications where he lead their professional services team in the Central US and later with leadership roles creating Cloud generation 1 companies and services as well as had a global accountability. For more information or contact John at: John Molinaro 219-629-0662 john.molinaro@sterliteusa.com