



Whether people shop on their home computer or mobile device such as an iPad mini (left), they are sensitive to website performance and security. Globally, 57 per cent of consumers will leave a retail or e-commerce site if it is slow. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

# The coming goldmine in mobile shopping

Being able to deliver a great shopping experience in-store, online and via mobile is the retailer's holy grail, but mobile will be the "it" platform if consumer bugbears are addressed. BY MARTIN RYAN

**O**NLY a few brick-and-mortar players or e-commerce players can claim to have achieved retail "nirvana" – the ability to provide an exceptional omni-channel shopping experience that spans across the physical store, online and mobile platforms. Omni-channel may be at the top of retailers' mind, but they are struggling to provide a good mobile experience for consumers.

A survey by cloud-based Internet performance company Dyn showed that more than 85 per cent of consumers surveyed globally cite clear differences in the kind of experiences they have when shopping in stores, online, and on their mobile devices. Asia-Pacific consumers are divided: those in Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore prefer the service and experience of shopping both online and via their mobiles; consumers in China, Hong Kong, and India for now prefer shopping online, and mobile shopping, unsurprisingly, remains a very distant third.

So how can e-commerce companies achieve retail "nirvana" that will keep customers coming back for more?

## Mobile shopping ripe for improvement

This year, shoppers around the world are expected to spend about US\$119 billion on goods and services purchased via mobile phones – a figure which represents about 8 per cent of the total e-commerce market, said Fierce Wireless.

While today's mobile-shopping experience may pale in comparison to in-store and online shopping, consumers are nonetheless planning to do more mobile shopping.

Consumers surveyed in China and India appear to be the most progressive when it comes to this. Only four in 10 of those surveyed globally make at least a quarter of their purchases on their mobile devices; in China, however, nearly 80 per cent do, followed closely by consumers in India (65 per cent).

Bain & Company said that 80 per cent of Chinese consumers who bought online last year made at least one purchase from a smartphone; 20 per cent are weekly mobile shoppers. The greatest increase in mobile shopping is expected to come from China and India.

## Consumers expect a lot from mobile shopping

Consumers are not cutting retailers any slack for a less-than-stellar mobile experience. More than 85 per cent of all consumers surveyed ex-

pect the same quality and speed of performance when shopping on mobile devices as they do when shopping online.

This expectation for consistency resonates strongly throughout the Asia-Pacific. It is highest in China, where 98 per cent of consumers surveyed want the same quality and speed of performance when shopping on their mobile devices as they do when shopping online. The majority of consumers surveyed in Malaysia (91 per cent), Hong Kong (90 per cent), India (90 per cent) and Singapore (89 per cent) agree.

## Slow websites and security are consumer concerns

While the survey found that Asia-Pacific consumers hold high expectations for mobile experience, they are also extremely sensitive to website performance and security.

Globally, 57 per cent of consumers will leave a retail or e-commerce site if it is slow. Asia-Pacific consumers appear less tolerant: as many as 85 per cent of Indian consumers surveyed and 75 per cent of their counterparts in China and Malaysia will leave websites at least a quarter of the time without buying anything because they are tired of waiting for the website to load; in fact, fewer than 6 per cent of Malaysian consumers surveyed are willing to wait.

More than 85 per cent of all consumers surveyed agree that the speed and quality of a website's performance affects their trust in that company. This statistic was higher among Asia-Pacific consumers, especially in Malaysia (98 per cent), Hong Kong (96 per cent) and Singapore (92 per cent).

Pinning poor performance on wireless carriers is a tough sell, because nearly three-quarters of all consumers surveyed primarily use WiFi when shopping on their mobile devices. Of those who plan to make more purchases from their mobile devices this year, nearly 80 per cent use WiFi rather than their cellular network when shopping.

## Three ways to improve the shopping experience

In order to compete and win the online global shopping war, consumers unanimously agree that online retailers need to:

- Ensure the same high quality experience whether shopping online, on mobile, or in store.
- Help consumers find what they need faster.
- Improve overall site appearance and the user experience.

Contrary to popular belief, a personalised experience doesn't appear to be nearly as important as these core elements. Consumers in every country surveyed want more consistency,

quality and reliability when shopping online, on their mobile devices, and in stores. Hence, the bottomline is to never let poor website performance drive away consumers.

Focus on creating an optimal user experience for online customers, whether they are new or repeat visitors to your website. Here are three key things to keep in mind:

■ **Improve the website's performance:** Since every customer's first visit to a website starts with a Domain Name System (DNS) query, avoid making customers wait for the website to load. Resolve DNS queries faster and route customers to the optimal endpoint for performance. The best way to do this is by outsourcing the job to a managed DNS provider with a vast global network and years of experience. Additionally, avoid website outages due to DDoS attacks (when the services of a host connected to the Internet is temporarily or indefinitely interrupted or suspended) by rerouting traffic to different global endpoints to help thwart an attack.

■ **Create a seamless and consistent omni-channel experience:** Whether customers are accessing the website from their home computer or on the go with their mobile device, putting in place features like active failover will ensure that they can always reach the website and experience the same performance, even during an outage. It is also good to have "load balancing", which enables one to route customers based on their location (country, state, or province) when they are travelling abroad, without compromising on website performance.

■ **Keep an eye on Internet trends:** Don't let avoidable slowness or website outages happen. Monitoring and analysing current Internet conditions can help retailers make important infrastructure decisions to help improve the overall website performance.

## The ball is in retailers' court

For years, retailers and e-commerce executives have been struggling to keep pace with consumer demands regardless of where, when or how customers are shopping. Technology advancements and globalisation have undoubtedly helped to expand the customer base and satisfy diverse customer needs.

However, it is the consumers who have the power of choice and the world of online retailers at their fingertips, so it is up to retailers to make a good first impression in-store, online and on mobile platforms to attract and retain customers. The alternative is to risk losing customers and dollars to the competition.

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