

Dialing in the Right Mobile Strategy

BY SAM NOYD

It can be utterly daunting. Or absolutely confusing. In the sea of mobile gadgets and apps that seems to be growing and changing every day, it's hard to know what to do. You know mobile is a hot area right now, but is it right for your company? How do you know if your current mobile strategy is the right one? How do you even get started in the mobile space?

A GOOD MOBILE STRATEGY STARTS WITH A GOOD BUSINESS STRATEGY

Mobile is more than just smartphones and apps — it can be a powerful tool to open doors and knock down barriers. It's anything that enables the mobility of your customers and employees. But before developing your mobile strategy, you need to define your business strategy and the top-level goals for your organization. Aligning your mobile strategy to your business strategy supports the business and keeps you from going down the rabbit hole. It can be tempting to look at the number of apps available and decide to build one of your own, but it might not always be the right answer for your company — especially if you find your consumers don't use smartphones or tablets on a regular basis. Making sure your mobile strategy aligns with your business strategy keeps you focused on delivering value.

Let's take a look at the retail banking industry. Many of the most recognized names in this space control numerous branches that make it convenient for their customers to interact with them. But this can also create a barrier to entry, making it difficult for others companies to enter the space. If we take an example of a fictional company that was currently not a major player in the retail banking space, how could their mobile strategy help them achieve their business strategy? We'll walk through this example to see what their journey might look like.

IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL (THE WHAT)

What goals are you hoping to achieve? What needs are you trying to fill? Pick an area of your business strategy and dig deeper. Is it optimizing customer

service? Is it growing your business by opening up access to a new set of customers? Once you've identified your top priorities, do a little research into what others have tried. Don't be afraid to look outside your industry, too. Since the mobile space is still relatively young, you might find some great ideas in other sectors.

Now let's take a look back at our example of a fictional company that is not currently a major player in the retail banking space — what might some of their goals be? One of their top business goals could be to serve their customers better and reduce the effort it takes to interact with the bank. Another goal could be to increase their market share in the retail banking space. Let's say they select serving their customers better as the top goal that they'd like to focus their efforts on.

LEARN ABOUT YOUR CONSUMERS (THE WHO)

Now that you've established the "what," you'll want to look at your consumers — both internal and external, to establish the "who." Who will be consuming your service or product? How can you provide value to them? How can you make their lives or jobs a little easier or better? Do you have customer satisfaction data or employee survey results you can use to help guide you?

Our retail banking company might look at customer segmentation data and discover that a significant portion of their customer base owns a smartphone or tablet and is comfortable using the internet. Customer satisfaction and survey data also indicate that this customer segment is having difficulty interacting with the bank and is exploring competitors to try to find an option that is more convenient.

A Basic Maturity Model for Mobile Strategy

STAGE 0: EVERYWHERE

Needs of mobile users unmet or unknown

Example: Desktop site with users' mobility unknown

STAGE 1: HISTORICAL

Basic needs of mobile users met

Example: Mobile version of website/tool with basic functionality

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION (THE WHERE)

You'll not only have to look at the "who" and "what," you'll also have to look at the location — or "where" the action takes place. A person's needs can vary greatly depending on if they are on the go or sitting at a desk. If your repair fleet is behind the wheel or working at a location, their needs will be different than that of a customer service department in a call center. Understanding where your consumers are when they are using your product or service is essential.

With our fictional banking example, the company might explore options such as opening new branch locations to make it easier for their customers to interact with them. The company could do a little digging and discover that of the customer segment in question, most have their primary mailing address within a very short distance of a branch location. Next they might look at the hours of operation to see if they needed to offer extended hours to make it more convenient for their customers. Again, the hours the customers were interacting with them were all in line with current hours of operation.

It wasn't until they looked at where their customers were interacting with them that they discovered something that led them to mobile. Of the customer segment in question, most were currently residing away from their primary mailing address. Some were students in college in a different part of the country, others were in the armed forces and deployed overseas, and many were traveling for work and not near a branch during the work week. These customers were primarily using phone, email and traditional mail to interact with the bank.

STAY FOCUSED ON PROVIDING VALUE

How can your mobile strategy provide value to the company? Will it provide additional revenue or reach a new subset of customers? Even if the value is in the form of less tangible or easy-to-measure benefits like building your brand or customer loyalty, make sure your mobile strategy is a win-win and creates value for your company as well as your customers.

For the fictional company interested in serving their customers better, the value for customers was to reduce the effort it took for them to interact with the company. The value to the company would be in increased customer satisfaction and the potential for increased customer self-service. Once they learned their customers were away from their home and were not near a branch location, they began to explore other alternatives. The company began looking at their mobile strategy to see if they could serve their customers better and help the company at the same time.

DON'T BET THE FARM

The mobile space is incredibly fluid and the changes are as rapid as they are drastic. Not too long ago, Mark Zuckerberg bet on HTML5 as the future for mobile and chose to develop Facebook's mobile apps using HTML5 instead of native applications that are customized to each platform. Zuckerberg has since said in an interview at TechCrunch Disrupt, "The biggest mistake we made as a company was betting too much on HTML5 as opposed to native. It just wasn't ready." Facebook has since rebuilt their apps to run natively.

STAGE 2: PRESENT

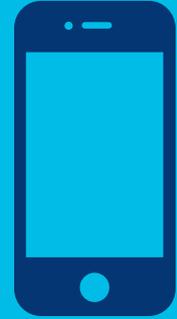
Intermediate and advanced needs of mobile users met

Example: Mobile website/tool can accomplish everything the full website can

STAGE 3: FUTURE

Innovative solutions that meet unrealized needs

Example: Mobile check deposit



If Facebook — with all of the resources at their disposal and technical prowess — makes mistakes, you can bet that you probably will, too. Don't bet the farm. Make sure to hedge your bets and be prepared to pivot.

CRAWL, WALK, RUN

Remember to crawl and walk before you run. When you start out, it can be easy to want to focus everywhere at once. Slow down and start with uncovering the needs of the consumers you identified. Create a roadmap or maturity model like the basic one in Figure 1 to help you get from where you are today to where you'd like to be. Work towards meeting the basic needs of your consumers and doing it well before you focus on fulfilling unrealized needs. This will help build a foundation of mobile skill sets that will pay dividends in the future.

The fictional company from our example started with creating a version of their website that was optimized for mobile. From there it developed an app that offered a better experience than the mobile website. Then they grew the app through several iterations and added the ability to deposit checks with a mobile device by simply taking a picture of the check. They stayed focused on providing value for their customers and for the company and in the process made everyone's lives a little bit easier.

SCHEDULE REGULAR CHECKPOINTS

Since the mobile space is still fluid and changing on a regular basis, you'll want to schedule checkpoints at regular intervals to circle back and make

sure your mobile strategy is still directionally correct. If you think about two years in the life of a traditional system or application, it may not seem that long. Some companies have systems that have been running for decades, but think about two years in the mobile space. How many changes have we seen in the mobile space in the last two years? Companies have gone from dominant players to struggling underdogs. Since it is still relatively young, mobile is changing very rapidly. Pick a schedule that works for your company and remember to revisit and refresh your mobile strategy if necessary.

CONCLUSION

Take a deep breath. It may look daunting at first, but once you've started your mobile strategy, you'll find it's a lot of fun. Start with your business strategy and make sure your mobile strategy stays in lock step. Pick an area where you think mobile could lend a helping hand and dive deeper to discover the "what." Learn about the in's and out's of your consumers and end users to uncover the "who." Focus on where the action or service is taking place because it's the "where" that can help you pull it all together. Take it one step at a time and keep circling back to make sure you're on the right path and in alignment with your business strategy. Take another deep breath. You've got this.

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