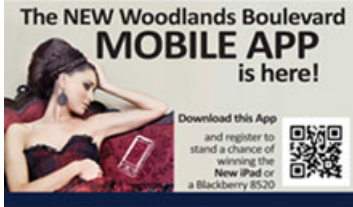


Mobile app increases mall's consumer appeal

Woodlands Boulevard Shopping Centre in Pretoria east has launched a mobile mall application that allows all the stores in the mall to form part of a Mall Wide Gift Registry, one of a variety of the app's features that will attract visitors to the mall and encourage them to participate in this unique shopping experience via their mobile phones.



Brides-to-be are no longer limited to a few stores offering a wedding registry facility. Through the download and use of this app, wedding couples can use the entire mall to create a gift registry. Mall visitors can also create and share with friends their wish lists for birthdays, baby showers and the festive season.

"Most mall apps focus purely on mall information," explains Allan Johns from Mallinfo, the developers of the application. "This has limited value to the regular visitors to the mall. The app is most definitely not an extension of a mobile website. "It is an extension of the mall itself, with the key focus on the user of the app. It provides users with traditional mall content such as store, products and amenity information and enables users to be entertained and to create and share information about the products and stores with whomever they choose."

Ease of use is key

The application has been tailor-made to help customers create and share their wish lists with their cell phones, using the application's scanner function. "After the mall visitor has downloaded the app, it is really quite straightforward to create a wish list or gift registry," says Pieter Geldenhuys, technology strategist and futurist at the InnovationAgency.com, who helped with the design of the app.

"Smartphone users need to scan the barcode of any product, identify the store they find themselves in, and add it to their wish list. Friends are invited to the wish list by simply choosing their names from the phone's contact list, where after the recipient is guided to the store where the product can be purchased. It is the perfect indirect way to tell others what you would like as a present."

According to Geldenhuys, ease-of-use is the key to this revolutionary application. "Consider the average male: Once your wife has created her wish list, you can click on gifts she has chosen and let the app tell you where it can be purchased. If

she has not created one, the application can make appropriate suggestions based on her age and your wallet. You can get amazing gift ideas sitting in a coffee shop with your buddies!"

Mobile meets shopping

The average mobile-savvy South African spends about 113 minutes each day browsing the Internet on their phones and 72% of South Africans are primarily accessing the Internet using their mobile phones.

A recent survey conducted by InMobi found that mobile devices are steadily becoming more integrated into the shopping experience. Thirty-eight percent of respondents use their mobile phones to scan product bar codes and read more information about the product online and 48% use their phones to conduct price comparisons.

According to the survey, some 36% of consumers use their phones to take pictures of products, which they then forward on to friends for a second opinion. Female youths are more likely to do so than any other demographic, the survey found.

What it means for consumers

According to Malize Jacobs, GM at Woodlands Boulevard, this means customers can look forward to more time relaxing while shopping and less time chasing that elusive perfect gift, running from store to store at the last minute.

"We believe that being first in the market improves the environment for both our tenants and visitors, it puts even more control in the palm of shoppers' hands - it's like having a personal customer services assistant," says Jacobs.

What it means for retailers

"The information gathered via the app is also invaluable to retailers," explains Geldenhuys, "as it allows them to do their stock planning more carefully." The retailers can also obtain information on which age and gender groups scanned their products and at which time of the week it occurred, allowing them to improve their advertising effectiveness. The app also allows retailers to create special offers and gift ideas via a tenant driven dashboard. This allows retailers to target specific age and gender groups, giving them unrivalled advertising efficiency.

Interest has already been expressed in doing the same elsewhere. The HyProp property group is already planning to use the application at other shopping centres in South Africa within the next year.

Geldenhuys says that the trend is for social media and social commerce to increase. Applications like this help to bridge the gap between e-commerce and the rest of the economy. "It is all about enriching the physical environment using technology and e-commerce. These two worlds are merging, helping consumers to spend their time effectively and enriching their shopping experience."

Consumers should also be on the lookout for smart phones becoming a preferred method of paying for goods or services. Phones may soon be swiped just as a bankcard is currently used. The smart phone will then become the focal point of the interaction between the physical and virtual shopping experiences.

Future developments

According to Jacobs, the mall will endeavour to stay at the forefront of retail innovation in 2012. "We will continue to innovate in the mobile sphere for shopping centres to create an indispensable tool for both our shoppers and retailers, which engages customers and merges the virtual and real world to create the best possible shopping experience."

Future uses for the application are endless. The centre is planning a MyTop10 competition which allows any user of the Woodlands app to choose 10 desirable products in the mall, and stand a chance of winning their top product.

Another possibility in the near future is to use the app as a platform to share coupons or vouchers with consumers. A customer will be rewarded with coupons the more they visit the mall.

Although there is no advertising on the app now, this may become a possibility, although the mall is careful not to let the app be used for any form of spam.

Current competition

The mall is hosting a competition during the months of July and August where the public could win a new iPad and a Blackberry 8520 if they download and register on the app under the "Wishes" or "My Stuff" icons.

The app for iPhone, Blackberry and Android is available free at www.woodlandsboulevard.mobi or can be downloaded from the website, www.woodlandsboulevard.co.za.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>