

Time to get your head around mobile marketing

By [Richard Mullins](#)

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Mobile marketing has been the subject of a great deal of hype for a number of years, but it has yet to really catch fire among South African marketers as a new channel for reaching their customers.



Many have only just started to come to grips with paid search marketing, search engine optimisation, email marketing and a host of other online tools and strategies, and have little appetite for adding yet more complexity to the mix. But now is the time to start thinking about what mobile marketing means for your business.

Though some analysts, publishers and agencies have perhaps overstated its potential in the short-term, many marketers are underestimating its long-term potential. Analyst group, Gartner, goes as far as to predict that by 2013, mobile phones will overtake PCs as the most common web access device worldwide. That trend will be especially significant in South Africa, where PC and fixed-line Internet penetration are so low. With more than 100% market penetration in South Africa - 10 times more than fixed-line Internet - the mobile phone is a channel that no marketer can afford to ignore.

There are two reasons why mobile is set to become such an important part of the marketers' arsenal: firstly, it allows for deep and personal engagements with customers and prospects; and secondly, there's a whole generation of consumers growing up with the mobile phone as their primary way of connecting to the world.

Caveats for marketers

There are also many reasons to be cautious about the way that one adopts the mobile channel into your marketing mix.

The fact that your customer's mobile phone is such a personal device is a double-edged sword: it provides an opportunity to engage in a more personalised manner, yet your customers could resent your intrusion into their space if you do not tread carefully. For example, waking a client up with a marketing SMS at 2am in the morning will hurt your brand more than it will help it.

You need remain aware of your customer's rights to - and sensitivities around - *privacy*. Supporting industry efforts around self-regulation and taking care to get permission from your clients to interact with them is even more important in the mobile world than it is in other forms of online marketing.

Another challenge lies in understanding the sheer amount of mobile marketing options on the table. In addition to the already-popular short message service (SMS), there are tools such as multimedia messaging services (MMS), the mobile Web, Bluetooth marketing and location-based services to consider.

These services vary in their maturity and usefulness. In addition, mobile marketing as a whole is still bedevilled by a number of factors such as a shortage of good online media inventory, difficulties with tracking and measuring users and their activity, and the challenges of reaching audiences that are fragmented across multiple carrier networks and handset platforms.

Part of a wider marketing mix

Against this backdrop, I believe that companies need to start experimenting with mobile, but in a way that treats it as part of a consistent, integrated marketing strategy. Mobile often complements other online and offline marketing efforts, and should not be treated as a standalone channel.

Even in a country like South Africa - where broadband Internet penetration is relatively low - mobile should not be treated as a replacement for the Web. It is a way to reach some customers that don't have Internet access using a low-cost channel, but doesn't replace the Web among consumers that have broadband Internet access.

The mobile phone is the device that will be increasingly central in a world where customers are almost always connected to the Internet, which means that there will be some exciting opportunities in the mobile space in the years to come.

For marketers, the challenge is in understanding how the mobile phone, the fixed-line Internet and other channels fit together in a world where everyone is connected 24/7.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Mullins holds an honours degree in communications from RAU and opened Acceleration's Johannesburg office in 2000 and has played an instrumental role in the growth of Acceleration in South Africa, working with clients to identify their online marketing needs and establish effective online marketing strategies that deliver superior results. This is achieved through the implementation of technology services such as Advertiser and Publisher Ad Operations, Email, Paid Search and Site Analytics. Acceleration provides digital marketing consulting, outsourcing and technology services to clients around the world. For more information, go to www.acceleration.biz.

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