

Mobile Ecommerce - Not for me.

A lot of large companies, including the likes of Target, Google and Apple are placing their bets on the next big thing for ecommerce. They all pretty much agree that it's going to be mobile ecommerce. Well I'm not buying (no pun intended) and here's why.

The ecommerce landscape is constantly changing to keep up with the demands of consumers who are becoming more and more tech savvy, expecting more features and functionality when it comes to their online shopping experience. The ecommerce industry has done a tremendous job keeping up with the expectations and keeping customers happy, but everyone is always wondering, what's the next big thing going to be?

Some very large companies are willing to bet it's going to be mobile ecommerce, and everyone else seems to be jumping in line as fast as possible to make sure they get a piece of the pie.

Before you dive into re-working your site for mobile users and expecting sales to double overnight, there are a few things that you should take into consideration. There are some pretty big hurdles still in front of us when it comes to conquering the smart phone universe by allowing consumers to purchase items on the go. Let's take a look at a few of the issues that still need to be solved before your customers are going to start making purchases while stopped at a red-light.

First off, just like with desktop browsing, we have the issue of the internet browser to think about. Not all phones are created equal, so unless you are willing to online target one customer segment who has access to one time of device then there is going to be some work to do to make sure you're providing a uniform shopping experience to all mobile customers. Devices like the iPhone and Nexus One come with full HTML browsers and are able to display web pages in full (sanes the Flash elements). So if you're ecommerce site functions properly in Safari or Chrome for the desktop then it's a safe bet it's going to be ok on those phones. Still, there are a lot of other phones that don't have the ability to display full HTML web pages and thus they fall back to rendering pages in a vertical fashion which essentially stacks all of the elements on top of each other for the user to scroll through. This is why a lot of sites create specific sub-domains to handle any mobile traffic they get. The sub domain is set up and all mobile visitors are re-directed to the mobile site. You can already see how this could be a problem depending on your ecommerce shopping cart's ability to render the site different based on the user's client information.

The next issue with mobile ecommerce that I see turning e-tailers away is the type of items that we can expect to see consumers purchase of the next couple of years. It would be great to say that everyone who shops on your website and has a capable mobile phone will also likely become mobile customers, but that's just not the case in current times. In the next few years I think we are going to see mobile ecommerce picking up steam, but I predict the majority of the purchases are going to be either small items that are needed right away (foreman orders a certain tool from the job site so it can be shipped out today and not loose a day or work) or simple re-order items that people use all the time (I know I'm out of that great coffee I ordered online, so I'll go ahead and place a re-order while sitting in my car). While any interaction is good, I'm not sure the big box retailers who are jumping full into the mobile ecommerce pool are thinking about things like this. I'm not going to order any kind of apparel, electronics or recreational products from my phone unless I'm very familiar with the product because I can order it when I get home and see all the larger images and read more about the product with having to do it all from a screen that's 10 times smaller than a desktop. I think this will be the biggest hurdle to get over. We're going to have to find a way to make consumers feel comfortable enough using their phones to go ahead and make the purchases they would have normally saved for later when they are at home or at the office to make.

Everyone is different, I'm the type of person who buys just about everything online, and I can say without a doubt any online purchase I make in the next little bit is going to be from my laptop not my smart phone. As an ecommerce developer I'm going to keep a keen eye on the whole mobile ecommerce situation, but I'm not going all in just yet. Once the industry matures a little bit and the technology is able to provide a better user experience then I'll think about making the move.

Love to hear your thoughts on the subject. Comment below.