

Embracing the iPhone Phenomenon August 2008

On Friday July 11, Apple changed the game once again with the introduction of the greatly enhanced and affordably priced iPhone 3G. This move is just the latest in a long string of product innovations that have brought ever more connectedness to the world. Looking back at the 10 years since the introduction of the original iMac, it's easy to conclude that Apple has continually improved and simplified the way we consume the exponentially increasing volume of information. But what makes the iPhone so special? Before we answer that question, I think it's important to take a step back and ask a couple of fundamental questions. By the way, it's a good idea for ALL companies to take a sort of 'philosophical inventory' and ask these same questions.

1. What do consumers want?

This seems pretty straightforward, right? Unfortunately it seems that many consumer product companies (and indeed services companies as well) tend to put less emphasis on this question and instead focus more attention on the answers to questions such as 'What can our developers deliver' or 'What can we produce to make money'. By glossing over 'What do consumers want', a valuable point is missed. In the case of the iPhone, I suspect consumers wanted a small device that delivered a rich multi-media experience and looked cool too. As long as I can remember, the 'look' or 'feel' of a mobile phone was one of the biggest factors in my decision to purchase. This simple factor is why I never had a Blackberry or Treo. I couldn't stand the thought of having this heavy, bulky device in my pocket all day long. But with the iPhone, that objection is a thing of the past. I'm sure business users wanted the ability to sync their phone with Microsoft Exchange and have their email, contacts, calendar with them at all times. So, Apple delivered a beautiful product that hits all of these consumer desires and they went a few steps further also. More on that later...

2. How can the product (in this case iPhone) become more a part of the everyday life of each user?

This question isn't as easy to answer, but nonetheless it's important to ask. There is no doubt that the 'always on' generation consumes more and more information and multi-media on the go. iPhone delivers an impressive user experience, including the ability to add custom applications to the phone, much like social networks such as Facebook and MySpace have done. Translation: people spend more time with their eyes on this 'third screen.' Users can download custom applications with a variety of functionality and purpose on the iPhone. Some are purely entertainment based, while others are educational or reference based. Still others interface directly to online social networks (MySpace and Facebook most significantly). And of course, the ability to browse the web with very little compromise truly sets iPhone apart from phones of yesteryear. Finally, the integration of iTunes and iPod functionality rounds out the package and solidifies the iPhone as the 'it' device to have. Remember what the iPod did for music on the go? Right – I thought so.

Ok, now for the question you are probably asking yourself, or should be asking yourself now - **How can I leverage the popularity of the iPhone for my brand?**

Well, first of all, you can step back and ask yourself questions such as 'what can I do to enhance the user experience while interacting with my brand' and 'what does our company do that can be translated to consumption of information or multi-media in a mobile environment, and will this provide added-value to the consumer?' Don't forget about the second half of that last question as it is **absolutely vital** to success. Consider these examples of companies that are leveraging iPhone to keep users engaged on the go:

- **Facebook** – now you can keep your status updated, view your wall, write on others' walls, chat with friends, etc. from a custom application built specifically for the iPhone. I'm betting that everyone who reads this will understand why this is so important – people are doing it anyway online, but the ability to whip out your phone and write a note on a friend's wall bonds each user ever closer to the community.
- **MySpace** – similar to Facebook, the MySpace application lets you view your friend requests, comments, friend updates, etc. all at a glance on the iPhone. I happen to like this application more than the Facebook application as it is more user-friendly and functionally robust. Again, members have instant access to their online network of friends almost anywhere, and in a way that is easier for them to do than using the web browser.
- **Pandora** – take your personalized stations with you anywhere! I dare you to find an application that's cooler than this one, on ANY platform. Similar to the website, users can listen to their personalized commercial-free radio stations and guide the station by telling it which songs they like and which ones they don't. You can create stations on the fly also. Simply feed it a song or artist and immediately the application will serve up music that is similar in nature. You think this enhances the Pandora user experience? You bet it does!

What the above examples have in common is the fact that they have existing online networks and competition for eyeballs and registered members. The fact that they are able to tap into users' mobile life while greatly improving the user experience (read: giving people what they want) makes it even more likely that loyalty to the brands will follow.

Ok, you might ask, 'but what about me?' Well, below are some examples of applications that don't yet exist (that I have found) that would be nice to have for iPhone. You can use your imagination on how these ideas might be modified to fit your brand.

- **Weather Channel** – yeah, I'm a weather geek! I subscribe to the premium service and pay an annual fee for enhanced content on weather.com. Wouldn't it be nice to take that premium content and my saved preferences with me on my iPhone so I can view them at a glance without having to go digging online? What if my city forecasts were

- available with one tap of the screen and what if I could easily scroll through forecasts by flicking the screen just like I can do with my contacts, emails, etc? I wonder if that would strengthen my relationship further with the brand? Hmmmm... you can answer that one for yourself.
- **Nike, Adidas**, etc. – We know these mega-brands have tons of content that they want the world to see, right? Think athletic endorsements, sponsored events, etc. We know they have a loyal following, right? What if customers who registered with the brands online had access to specific content in an easy to consume way? What if the brands could send alerts to these members about new products on-the-go? What if a user could go to a Nike app on his or her iPhone and locate a retailer near their location. What if they could show their iPhone and receive something special when making a purchase? What if, what if, what if? There are plenty of ‘what ifs’ that could be asked here. The point is that these brands could tap into a totally new world of on-the-go consumers who have money to spend.
 - **Delta** – what if I could go to my iPhone and pull up my itineraries and check on flight status quickly? What if I could check in and pick my seats on my iPhone in a custom application designed to only provide the vital functions without all the other clutter? As I type this, I’m on a Delta flight to NYC that had a gate change this morning. If the Delta application were on my iPhone, I would have known about the gate change without having to find the departures screen in the hectic airport and search out my flight. Delta already has all my information – why not serve important, timely information up to me in a way that improves MY experience?
 - **Starbucks** – What if a caffeine-starved traveler could whip out his or her iPhone and find a Starbucks near their location? What if the user could answer a few questions online to create a sort of ‘coffee profile’, and when he or she opened the Starbucks application, the app would suggest a drink they might not have tried yet. What if, like Pandora, the user could try the drink and give it a thumbs up or thumbs down or rate their satisfaction with the drink and the application would adjust its recommendations in the future? I wonder if that would keep people drinking Starbucks coffee or possibly increase sales?

Ok, enough free ideas! Hopefully you get the point here. All companies can benefit from becoming more a part of their customers’ lives, and the iPhone brings an incredible opportunity to do this and to be with the customer wherever they may be. Think about it – Apple sold 1 million 3G iPhones in its first weekend on the market! Oh, and there have been lines out the door every day since then. I waited for almost 5 hours to get mine, and that was in the middle of the week 5 days after it was released. The affordability, functionality, and utter beauty of this phone are sure to solidify its place in mainstream pop culture. With this vast user base increasing every day, it seems to make sense to invest a little bit in this area. And we’re not talking about rocket science here. The relatively low cost of developing and deploying a mobile application compared to the potential upside for brands of all sizes and disciplines makes this a no-brainer in my opinion.

Connecting with consumers and enhancing the relationship you have with these consumers is THE goal here, period. Listen to them – ask them what they want. Find out how you can improve THEIR experience so that the sales follow naturally. Don't put the cart before the horse – the customer is FIRST! Never lose sight of this, no matter how busy or chaotic your situation might be. By framing your approach and asking the right questions, you'll be in a much better position to become part of this phenomenal generation of consumers.

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