EMBRACING MOBILE CHAT

Consumers—and companies—are giving chat the thumbs up for an improved mobile experience.

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IT'S NO SURPRISE TO BUSINESS leaders that mobile is increasingly the device of choice for consumers—though many have not anticipated the rate at which traffic via the mobile channel has grown. Research firm GfK reported that smartphones accounted for 17% of total time spent on the Internet across all devices in 2012, compared to 12% in 2011. Tablet usage doubled—accounting for 6% of online time last year vs. 3% in 2011. By contrast, desktop and laptop computers dropped to 73% from 83% the previous year.

And consumers aren't just using mobile devices to surf. Monetate, a provider of testing, targeting and personalization technology to online retailers, reported that, on Christmas Day 2012, almost one-third of all ecommerce traffic came from smartphones (16%) and tablets (15.6%)—double the amount from the previous year.

But, although smartphones and tablets continue to grow in popularity, it seems that companies need to do more to engage customers through mobile apps and the mobile web experience. For instance, Monetate's research shows that, while more consumers are using their mobile devices to shop and research purchases, smartphone conversion rates remain low (1.2% for smartphones; 4% for tablets).
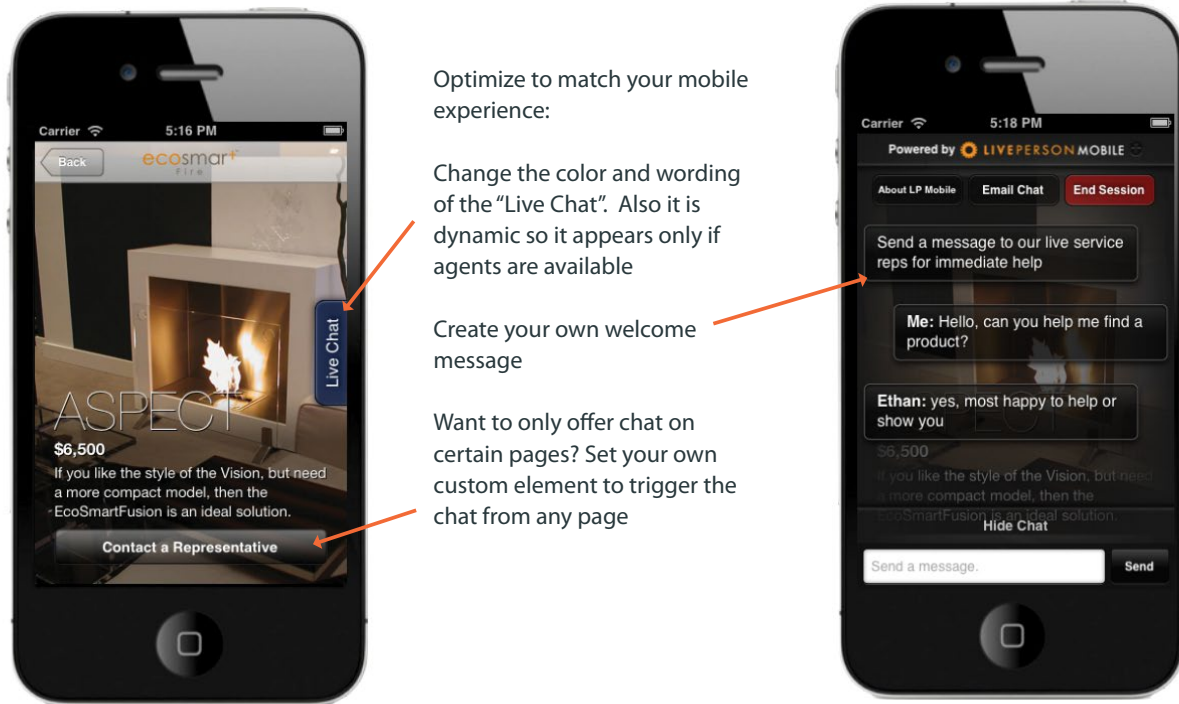
Chat as a Customer Engagement Opportunity

Improving customer engagement is a top concern for companies with mobile access across sectors, says Ethan Alexander, head of mobile for LivePerson, a provider of real-time intelligent engagement solutions. Those in financial services are looking for better ways to service their members, while travel and hospitality providers are focused on both customer service and higher conversions. Many leading-edge brands are turning to live chat to improve mobile app stickiness and provide a smoother experience.

"We're seeing mobile chat adoption across most industries—more so in retail, financial services, insurance and telco," says Anand Subramaniam, VP of worldwide marketing for eGain, a provider of real-time intelligent engagement solutions. "These businesses are aiming to create the 'wow' factor in chat, going beyond vanilla chat to include richer forms of chat, as well as real-time web collaboration. Mobile chat is particularly useful in the customer engagement domain for sales and service." eGain's SuperChat is an all-in-one solution that allows companies to engage with customers beyond text chat with unified auto chat, video, voice and cobrowse capabilities. The chat console is available as a widget for web tops, desktops, and mobile devices. (To see a video of eGain's SuperChat solution, visit: http://www.egain.com/products/chat/)

So how can companies provide a richer mobile experience? Subramaniam offers the following examples:

- Retailers can make intelligent mobile offers based on a 360-degree context (e.g., customer location, customer insight from past interactions and transactions, current context, etc.). For instance, when a shopper searches for information about a product, a retail chain could provide not only product information, but also a coupon that could be used at one of their local stores near where the consumer is physically located. A pure-play e-tailer could offer a coupon for an online purchase when a consumer is located at a click-and-mortar competitor's storefront.

- A financial services or insurance buyer could cobrowse with a human agent while talking to him at the same time. The agent could help the consumer fill out online forms, sell the policy, and onboard the customer.

- A prescription services provider could send out proactive notifications that are unified across SMS, email, and voice about prescription status, refills, and promotions.

Optimize to match your mobile experience:

Change the color and wording of the "Live Chat". Also it is dynamic so it appears only if agents are available

Create your own welcome message

Want to only offer chat on certain pages? Set your own custom element to trigger the chat from any page

With LivePerson Mobile Chat, the app or website is still visible in the background while the chat conversation takes place on the overlay. **FIGURE 1, Above**
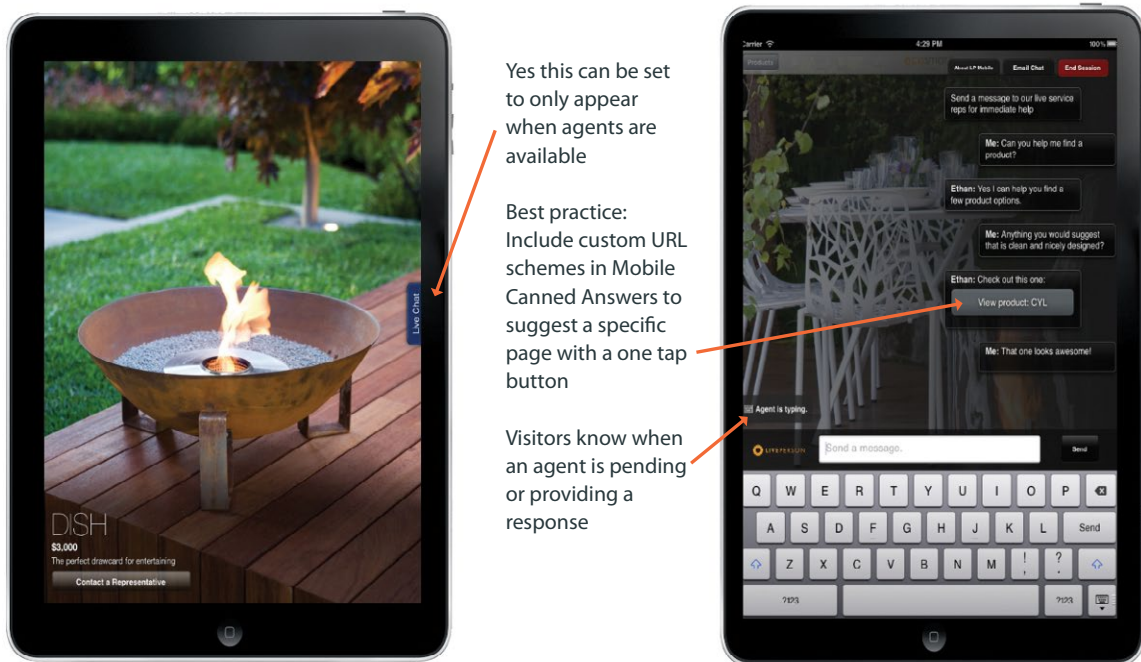
The Wow Factor

Mobile chat offers an opportunity to impress customers and provide a quality experience that ultimately translates into bottomline benefits. And yet, for many business leaders, the first reaction might be... why would anyone want to chat with an agent on a mobile device that doesn't have a physical keyboard?

In fact, Alexander says that this is a common question asked by clients. This is because when most people think of chat, they're picturing the more traditional format with a website interface as well as objectives and types of discussions that occur online. The mobile chat experience differs from the traditional web version in several ways.

The most obvious is the limited screen real estate and the fact that customers may—but not always—be on the go.

LivePerson's Mobile Chat is an overlay solution that enables the mobile user to interact within the company's mobile app or mobile-optimized website. Unlike webchat that pops open in a separate window, when a user clicks on a "live chat" tab or button on their mobile device, a see-through overlay covers the screen. (The tab itself is dynamic and only appears when an agent is available.) The app or website is still visible in the background while the chat conversation takes place on the overlay (see Figure 1). Users can see agent actions (e.g., "Agent is typing"), and if the user wants to continue shopping or using the mobile app, they simply click on the tab again, which then slides the chat to the side. When the agent responds, the

Yes this can be set to only appear when agents are available

Best practice: Include custom URL schemes in Mobile Canned Answers to suggest a specific page with a one tap button

Visitors know when an agent is pending or providing a response

LIvePerson's tips for providing a superior mobile chat experience. **FIGURE 2, Above**

overlay comes back with the agent's response and the user can continue the conversation. (To view a video of the LP Mobile Chat interface and agent console side by side, visit: http://bcove.me/cmxs5o9g)

Mobile customers are initially astonished at the ability to chat with a live agent on their smartphone, Alexander says. Chat transcripts typically show opening questions to be along the lines of "is this real?" But as they continue with the chat, they find that they can place the order, get a confirmation, and do all the things they would do in a traditional web chat, which translates into higher Csat scores and conversions.

Alexander says that mobile visitors are embracing mobile chat in a big way. LivePerson's clients are seeing remarkable growth in mobile chat volume. Take, for instance, online travel agency CheapOAir, whose chats include sales and service-related interactions, such as helping customers purchase vacation or travel packages and changing airlines, hotels or car reservations. Its mobile channel currently handles 4,000 to 5,000 chats a month, and its volume has been growing 20% to 25% every six to eight weeks, he says.

Providing a High-Quality Service Experience
Companies should keep in mind that customer goals and expectations are different for mobile chat versus web chat. For one thing, mobile customers are more focused than web visitors. "They're not there to browse," Alexander says. "They're looking for a particular action, so their questions are direct."

That focused intent means that overall handle time is roughly 60% of what it would be

for the same interaction online, he says, adding that, "We're finding that our clients are able to take more mobile chats than online chats. Agents who were previously handling three or four online chats can take four or five mobile chats."

Information about the customer's mobile device, network, and browsing history is delivered to the agent, so the agent realizes that they're interacting with a mobile customer and can adjust their approach accordingly.

How so? "Answers should be shorter, more concise, very focused on that environment—the mobile website or the mobile application—because the data is very different," Alexander says. "Create mobile canned answers for the typical questions that occur. Try to keep responses to 160 characters if you can because you don't want to take up too much of that screen."

Alexander also recommends utilizing "custom URL schemes," which are URLs that are embedded in a button rather than pasting a long string of characters into the chat, which doesn't look good on a mobile screen (see Figure 2). Besides its pure aesthetic value, the custom URL becomes part of the chat transcript and it's very easy for the customer to click on a button to bring them directly to a specific page, which makes the overall experience easier.

Another thing to keep in mind is that heavy volume periods for mobile chat will differ from traditional call volume spikes. Alexander says that LivePerson's clients are seeing a slight increase in mobile chat volumes during "off" times such as morning commute hours, downtime around lunchtime, late afternoons and evenings.

Ethan Alexander
HEAD OF MOBILE, LivePerson

Additional Considerations

Deploying mobile chat is relatively quick and simple for companies that have mobile apps or fully mobile-enabled sites (i.e., no pinch-and-zoom pages).

eGain's Subramaniam offers the following considerations to ensure a seamless experience:

- Businesses should make sure that their customer engagement solution supports responsive web design in which the user interface makes automatic adjustments to the form factors of various consumer devices—whether they are smartphones, tablets, traditional laptops or desktops—for an optimal viewing experience.

- Given the limited real estate in mobile devices, canned responses for mobile chat should be made shorter while drawing content from the same unified multichannel knowledge base for consistency.

- Mobile self-service should be unified with assisted mobile services like human chat. Businesses need to take an unsiloed "hub" approach to multichannel customer

engagement in order to make this a reality.

(To read more about how to develop a cohesive enterprisewide mobile strategy, see "Mobile and the Contact Center: The Game Is Changing," *Pipeline*, November 2012.)

Customers Opt for Apps

"We expect continued explosive growth in mobile adoption with mobile chat apps becoming richer, smarter, and more collaborative," says Subramaniam.

Mobile consumers seem to agree. A recent survey by ClickFox ("Mobile Apps for Customer Service") found that more than 90% of respondents said they would replace some (72%) or all (21%) traditional customer service channels with a mobile app, if available.

"The future is bright for mobile chat," Alexander says. "The web is flat now, while mobile is the biggest growth opportunity. Given the way that interactions are occurring, we might only be talking about a mobile component four or five years from now. Our clients are seeing that around 20% of their overall chats are starting to come from mobile—and these are groups that have only been doing this for five or six months, so it's quite impressive." ℗

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