WHITEPAPER

AUTOMOTIVE MARKETING: EFFECTIVE USE OF VEHICLE CONTENT WITHIN MOBILE APPLICATIONS

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Overview

Today's consumer has a wide variety of mediums through which to remain ever in touch, aware, and up to date with current events, news, family and friends, and topics of interest. Through the advent of social media platforms and mobile applications, most information is readily accessible.

> *Consumers are utilizing… the ability to scan a wide variety of information at surface level with the option to dig deeper as time or interested indicates.*

One of the largest challenges that consumers face is not how to find information, but rather how to limit this information to a digestible format.

Consumers are not only facing ever increasing choices for automotive vehicle research content, but are also driving content creation through forum posts, consumer reviews and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google, Yahoo, and Yelp, to name a few.

The staggering amount of information available has given rise to a new breed of applications which attempt to aid consumers in filtering information. Communication and information overload are an ever increasing struggle as consumers attempt to deal with the deluge of texts, IM's, email, tweets, wall posts, and feeds. This struggle to manage information happens even before exposure to advertising and topical content such as news, research, and online shopping.

One of the results of information deluge is that consumers have learned to absorb tremendous amounts of information within small, digestible, and frequent "bites". Consumers are increasingly utilizing websites, mobile applications, and services that allow more intelligent interaction (both UI and AI) and provide the ability to scan a wide variety of information at a surface level with the option to dig deeper as time or interest dictates.

The News360i mobile application is an excellent example of a "new breed" mobile application which uses artificial intelligence and semantic analysis to aggregate news from around the world into a simple high level topic heading list. Among some of the highest user rated features of this application are the ability to drill in levels deep on topics of interest as well as the ability to select the source of the news.

News360 now competes effectively with single news sourcing and may be poised to lead in this category based on rate of adoption and consumer satisfaction.

What does this mean for automotive marketing – specifically vehicle marketing companies?

When marketing to consumers via mobile application, care must be taken to present information in a way that supports browse / use patterns. Taking a cue from data and news aggregators and giants such as Facebook and Google, information must be presented in a format that allows the consumer maximum control over depth of information, and also in a manner that supports the consumers need to access small relevant pieces of information rapidly.

Available Content

For the last 10 years, automotive marketing companies have had access to tremendous digital libraries of information through automotive data sources. This content includes vehicle specifications, vehicle comparison data, vehicle builder configurations, photo libraries, video collections, and also generic model information such as vehicle reviews and compiled vehicle press content.

Today there are more marketing avenues and mediums than ever before. For each medium it is important to develop a strategy consistent with consumer use/view patterns while at the same time leveraging the strengths of the medium.

In this paper the focus remains on developing content for mobile applications, and one of the challenges is how to utilize available content in this medium. It is easy to find cases where either not enough information is provided within mobile applications, or where the large amount of content becomes prohibitive to use and is simply not going to be an effective shopping or research tool. The key then is to utilize content in a way that best supports the consumers shopping and research pattern as well as optimizing for the medium.

Consumer Shopping and Research Patterns

According to a study of consumer online shopping and research patterns, consumers favor sites which contain time saving elements such as pop-up descriptions, ability to optionally view photo galleries, and more importantly for the purposes of this article:

- Product summaries before full product information
- Product comparison via organic / user driven content rather than OEM / retailer recommendations

The study indicated that most consumers value consumer reviews and information provided through third party data, rather than relying heavily on the manufacturer or retailer to identify items of comparison.

This information is extremely valuable not only for mobile applications but for other mediums as well such as non-mobile websites and research tools. It becomes more critical however to optimize for consumer shopping and research patterns when using mobile applications because space, bandwidth and competition for time by other applications are even more of a factor.

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Using Content in New Ways

In order to provide a valuable mobile resource for vehicle shopping and research, there has to be

a) Value in the vehicle content (informative, third party content, organic elements)

b) Content provided in a means that supports preferred shopping and research patterns (summaries, staggered depth of information)

c) A process which is compatible with the medium (mobile application, screen, limitations, page loads, bandwidth)

d) A process which lends itself to the patterns of consumer use of mobile applications in general (simple, fast, easy to share, and refer back to)

The goal of an effective mobile application is to provide a resource that the consumer will refer back to, recommend, and continue to find value in every time there is something vehicle or automotive related while still achieving the goals of the marketing program to obtain greater consumer exposure and realize business benefit.

Digital automotive content today is more diverse than ever before. The challenge is compiling and utilizing this content in ways that will meet the goals above within the mobile application.

The diagram below illustrates just a few examples for content combinations and presentation in a way that will work for mobile applications.

Vehicle Search

Traditional	Quick and Easy Comparisons
User Selects: Year, Make, Model, Trim Parameters for miles, color, distance, private party / dealer etc.	Rather than starting with what the consumer knows, instead provide the means to help the consumer identify what they do not know about vehicles. Using more of a "bottom up" search provides the consumer with the ability to identify vehicles that have not previously been considered. For example, mini-van vs. midsize SUV or crossover with similar features. "Bottom up" search can also provide the consumer with the means to identify equipment and options of interest as well as defining other key characteristics such as mileage, green scores, safety ratings, and then to learn about brands and/or vehicles within brand that match the criteria.

Additionally, by creatively combining elements from various content sources into a single, short overview or summary about a vehicle – the consumer is able to quickly digest interesting and possibly influential information that may guide their decision for purchase or extended research into a brand, or available models within a brand.

Summary information can be strategically combined to target various demographics. For some of these demographics, rim size and telematics may be key items of interest. For others, safety ratings, comfort, gas mileage, and seating may be prime factors.

An ancillary benefit of compiling brief and targeted vehicle summary information is that the format may work well when posted or re-distributed to social media platforms, and may be ideal for consumers to re-broadcast and share as organic user content.

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Consider the following:

Vehicle Results (from search above)

Traditional	Quick and Easy Comparisons
1) Consumer views: Year, Make, Model, Trim, Engine, Transmission, Mileage, and a Photo. 2) The next step / click will direct the consumer to a page with an encyclopedia of information about every specification of the vehicle. • Click to request a quote • Click to find a dealer near you • Click to find out your monthly payment	The consumer views: Year, Make, Model: 2009 Car of The Year award, Best in Class Midsize Sedan. MPG 29 hwy, 25 city, Microsoft Sync Bluetooth enabled, 17 inch wheels come standard. Gutsy V6 and performance suspension and steering result in a high performance feel. One of the best values for under $25k. • Bookmark this vehicle • Click for review & photos • Click to compare based on your pref. features • Click to see what others are saying • Click to find out what is available locally • Recommend to friend, email, share-it etc..
Assessment: The focus is on call to actions that support sales process. Consumer is not likely to repeat this process to find a specific equipment piece, or feature, or to read many lengthy reviews and repeat several calls to action. Vehicle comparison using this approach is difficult.	Assessment: Layer one allows the consumer to rapidly browse, research, and dig in as time and interest allow, esp. with the bookmarking feature. Stronger calls to action may be introduced at deeper levels. This format is ideal for mobile apps and the content is suitable for most social media platforms. With the addition of social media "likes", "dig-its", and "recommend to a friend" or "share it" functionality –this small blurb can be rebroadcast across a large audience.

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This example should not be interpreted as a black and white statement of what will work, but rather one possible way of reshuffling content in a consumer and medium friendly format. Clearly there are benefits to traditional formats for search and display based on the context and medium. However, when consumer mobile application use is taken into account, there should be some change in how information is layered, compiled and displayed.

Several media and marketing companies have demonstrated a keen and early awareness of changes in consumer research patterns, particularly in regards to vehicle marketing. From automotive portals which start off a vehicle comparison with technology features such as telematics, to dealer microsite providers that highlight unusual characteristics of a vehicle targeting certain demographics (with social media integration), to media companies that focus on customized content delivery engines, the industry is beginning to adapt, reshuffle, and find new ways to continue to meet changing consumer needs and interest.

Leveraging Available Content

The old adage "content is king" takes on a new meaning in this information age where there are more sources and flavors of information than ever before. "Flexible content is king" may be a more accurate description of the ideal content to meet consumer research requirements.

In order to break down and recombine information, the source material must be effectively data-based with a design that supports key category and field retrieval. The time has passed where large single table databases can be very functional or valuable. Some data sources are more agile than others in this regard, while others provide customized web services and content customization.

Ideally, companies should develop the capability to utilize snippets of vehicle reviews, press statements, and vehicle options, with the ability to customize the content for various mediums and demographics. The more flexible the content delivery system is, the more powerful the tools and products that are developed can be.

Summary

Consumers will pick the medium, format and content that best allows them to find the information that they need, prioritized by how quickly and efficiently they can browse it and digest it. As more and more consumers opt to research within mobile applications, space and functionality become increasingly important to design elements.

You can always "click for more" but consumers will not always wait for a large page to load, or take the time to read through paragraphs of information to find the key information they are looking for.

In order to keep pace with mobile and social media marketing, the following statements may best serve as focal points for development and design:

1. A consumer's greatest commodity is time, and there is fierce competition for content and especially mobile applications that will qualify for this time.
2. Consumers prefer summaries before detail. The summary must be attractive enough to warrant any further time investiture. Mobile applications are used for quick handy research and content and layout must support this pattern of use.
3. Consumers prefer a more organic source of product comparison than manufacturer or retail directed suggestions.
4. Consumers prefer to reference several sources of information during the process of researching potential purchases.

i www.news360app.com, Top five News Category iTunes apps, March 2011
ii www.analogik.com, Analysis of consumer behavior online, Dejan Petrovic, 2007

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