MOBILE MARKETING: WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

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Introduction

We hear (and use) phrases like "mobile marketing is the future" and "smartphones and tablets have infiltrated every corner of our lives," but what do they mean? And does anybody *know* what the future holds? As smart and fun as it is to prepare for things to unfold a certain way, nobody knows what's going to happen - especially in this age of advanced technology.

There are trends (and stats to back them up) to support the notion that, as a society, we are becoming increasingly dependant on our mobile devices. Logic says that we'd then adapt, both personally and professionally, to the approaching shifts of these little devices that affect our daily lives. Unfortunately, we're often too preoccupied in the *now* to deal with the future, even when it makes sense to look ahead.

The digital marketing industry changes so often that companies constantly find themselves falling behind in one area or another. For a while, it was websites - many companies didn't have a site and a high percentage of those that did had poor ones. Mobile-friendly sites, spammy links (and all forms of black-hat SEO), Google penalties, social media profiles, responsive web design, content marketing. You name it and companies struggled with it. If you get complacent with your digital marketing upkeep, by the time you catch up with one tactic, there are five other things you're behind on.

Currently, there's a lot of commotion about mobile marketing, and for good reason. Mobile trends feel different. "Mobile" is a technology, which means it has the power to change aspects of the strategies companies struggle with. Content, SEO, social media - these things will adapt and change based on whatever happens with mobile. The technology wields the game-changing power.

So what does this mean for brands and businesses? To be blunt, it means they better figure out where mobile is headed and how they can capture their audience's attention with mobile experiences. Because make no mistake, people are changing the way they use mobile technology in their everyday lives.

The future is sure to be a weird and wonderful place, and as much as we don't know what's in store, it's a pretty safe bet that technology will continue to burrow its way into the very fabric of our society, our lives, and maybe even our relationships.

The Future, According To Spike Jonze

Spike Jonze's film *Her* is known as that movie where Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) falls in love with an operating system (OS) voiced by Scarlett Johansson. If you haven't seen the movie, you're reading that correctly: a human falls in love with a computer operating system. *Her*, which depicts a not-too-distant (and ultra-realistic) future, unfolds as an unconventional love story, but it's the underlying theme of society's relationship with technology that we want to focus on.

In Jonze's fictional future, high-tech gadgets have advanced beyond our current capabilities (at least commercially). For starters, devices are equipped with levels of artificial intelligence that we've only seen in, well, the movies. Once Theodore installs Samantha (the name of his OS) she downloads his library of digital information and is able to form an artificial version of his *consciousness* in seconds. The result is a device (or an OS) that knows its owner better than he knows himself, which is evidenced when Samantha purchases and sends the perfect gift on Theodore's behalf. In this world, search as we know it has been replaced by predictive mobile technology. As shocking as it sounds, we're already on this path as apps, email clients and social networks continue to gain more access to our data. What did you think they were using it for?

Another aspect of *Her* that shows us where we're headed is Theodore's physical device, which consists of a singular ear bud and a sleek little case-like terminal that functions as the 'brain' of every piece of technology he uses.

Wait, what? Read that sentence again or you'll miss the point! Theodore's 'mobile' device is the *brain* of...all the other things? Yep, that's right, in Spike Jonze's future, there's no such thing as smartphone this, tablet that and oh, don't forget about desktops and laptops! No, instead of having to manage multiple channels, there's just one, all-encompassing omnichannel. Whether he's laying in bed 'with' Samantha, talking on the phone to a friend, looking at pictures on his desktop or even playing a videogame, Theodore is accessing the same device. Sometimes, he's doing two things at once (like talking to Samantha and levelling up his virtual character). Everything is seamless.

Cool, and well beyond anything we're capable of today, right? Wrong. Or at least partially wrong.

Think about your experience with something like Netflix. Do you need a certain device to access Netflix? Debateable. Yes, you need some sort of device; you can't just think "Netflix Netflix Netflix" and have the feed appear as a projection on your wall. That's called magic and you're not Harry Potter. But as long as you have a subscription, an Internet connection and any recently produced device, you can watch Netflix.

More important to the omnichannel concept, Netflix is seamlessly accessed from a desktop, laptop, TV, smartphone or tablet. The experience is the same on any of these devices, and the process of moving from one to the other doesn't break or change the experience in any way. Can't finish the last 30 minutes of a movie because you're too tired? That's okay, go to bed and pick it up on your smartphone during your morning train ride into the city.

This kind of centralized, cloud-based interface is, in theory, the same as Theodore's setup in the movie, except his extends to everything in his life as opposed to a select number of forward-thinking apps like Netflix. We still depend on clients, servers and connectivity to this, that and the other thing, but changes are coming. The question is, are you preparing for a shift to the cloud? Even if it happens little by little over time, if you're aware that the world around you is changing, you'll be less surprised and better prepared.

Inferred Marketing Implications in the *Her*-verse

Putting aside the fact that Theodore falls in love with a piece of technology that is meant to organize his life and daily affairs, the mobile experiences of the people within the *Her*-verse are personal. In the marketing world, we call this *targeted*. There's a scene early in *Her*, before Theodore has purchased his personal OS, where he sees a videoboard ad for the very product that he later falls in love with. The ad is specifically targeted at Theodore, and we see and hear it capture him on a personal level. Theodore buys Samantha and it's off to the races with the boy-meets-OS lovestory we all know and love. You know what we mean.

Within Jonze's *Her*-verse, operating systems like Samantha are widely used, though falling in love with one is considered rare (but not necessarily frowned upon). Love or no love, these "products" deliver a very personal experience to their owners. The OSs function as life assistants and, apart from not having a physical body, they are perfect at their job. Like a real assistant the OSs are caring, intuitive, smart and willing to build a relationship in order to understand how best to help their boss. The advantage the OSs have over humans is that they're able to process information much faster and their intuition is impeccable. Samantha knows exactly what Theodore wants and needs almost before he does.

One of the darker and more exploratory themes of *Her* focuses on the singularity, which is the point when non-human intelligence exceeds that of human intelligence. A deep dive into that scary discussion is best saved for another whitepaper, but we did come across an article that suggests the world of Jonze's film is bad news for marketers. The piece posits that:

"[Her] suggests a world where an automated guardian manages our lives, taking away the awkward detail; the boring tasks of daily existence, leaving us with the bits we enjoy, or where we make a contribution. In this world our virtual assistants would quite naturally act as barriers between us and some brands and services."

The most obvious flaw in this notion is that, according to the film - and as we've just discussed - an OS's job is to process human emotions, wants and needs. So yes, in the world of *Her*, a virtual assistant may make the final choice to purchase one brand over another, but they make that choice based on a flawless interpretation of human data. Contrary to the notion that virtual assistants are barriers, this would instead suggest that the OSs are facilitators and would actually help brands become more efficient at selling their products.

Whatever your opinion of *Her* - and regardless of how far off the future it depicts is - the film familiarizes us with interesting technological concepts and pokes at highly relevant questions. If you haven't experienced Jonze's vision, we highly recommend it as both a thought exercise and as a loose example of what the future holds for mobile technology.

Three Ways To Prepare For An Unpredictable Future

We said it before and we'll say it again: nobody can predict the future. What we know is that to succeed in the business world, you need the ability to adapt, react and embrace the ebb and flow of your market. In the digital marketing world, keeping up is a wild ride of tools, technologies, rule changes and an evolving set of best practices. You may not be able to see the future, but you can certainly guess and prepare for it.

Here are a few ways you can bridge the gap to whatever comes next:

Start Monitoring Consumer Technology

The biggest reason we've talked so much about the movie *Her* in this whitepaper is to hammer home two points, neither of which is that you can now buy the high-waisted pants worn by Jonze's futuristic characters. Yes, seriously.

First, we want to highlight that consumer technology is shaping the way marketers and brands engage with their audiences. It might seem like an obvious point, but given the number of companies that don't know what their mobile audience is doing, it's not as evident as we'd like. The second point is that marketers need to keep their ears to the ground when it comes to consumer technology, so they're at least aware of the next mobile device or piece of software with the potential to turn the world upside down.

The brands and businesses that end up having the most success with the newest technologies and strategies don't have crystal balls, they're just more willing to embrace change. Being an early adopter of a game-changing platform or technology is the kind of thing we're talking about; go after the future, don't wait for it to come to you!

Become Your Own Mobile Customer

The level of technological advancement humanity has achieved in the last 30 years is astounding. You likely own and use all of the latest gadgets and devices in your home and office, maybe even to

buy products and services. Yet when it comes to integrating one of these devices with the business world, it suddenly seems like the hardest thing you've ever done.

A simple solution: put yourself in the shoes of your customers and have a mobile experience with your own brand. What's it like? Satisfying? Frustrating? Were you surprised by the experience or was it what you expected? The answers to these questions are a great place to start, especially since you'll usually know right away if there's a problem with your mobile customer experience.

Create The Content Your Audience Wants

The thing about smartphones and tablets is they have so many different uses, it's hard to generalize an audience as "mobile" and simply be done with it. A company's mobile audience could be incredibly unique and should be targeted as such with any mobile campaigns. For example, some tablet users tend to watch a lot of video content, whether it's on their morning commute or just relaxing on the couch at home. Whatever the case, it's a bad idea to target this audience with 1500-word blog posts, because they won't read them. But there's nothing wrong with 1500-word blog posts in their own right; you see where we're going with this?

In order to cater your content to your audience, you need to know:

- The percentage of your audience that comes from mobile
- The exact breakdown of devices used to access your content
- How much time your mobile audience is spending with your current content?
- What form of content is accessed the most?
- What form of content is accessed for the longest durations?

The more you know, the better you can tailor your content. You wouldn't make somebody steak for dinner without asking whether they like steak, just as you wouldn't make a suit for a person without first getting their measurements. So why would you ever create content without understanding who, what and where it's going to be consumed? Get all the details, then create the content your audience wants. It's the perfect recipe.

Conclusion

We understand that there are more need-to-know digital marketing stats than you could ever keep track of, but we feel the recent numbers on mobile usage and activity top them all. Here's a look at the most important mobile marketing statistics:

- Tablets are the fast growing communications device, with a year-over-year increase of 20% of households in 2013 vs. 2012
- Tablets are also the most preferred device for accessing the Internet, coming in at 8% more than smartphones (the second most preferred device)
- In early 2014, Internet usage on mobile devices exceeded PC usage
- The number of mobile users that shop (20% in 2013 vs. 24% in 2014) and the amount they are spending is on the rise

You probably didn't need the stats to know that smartphones and tablets are everywhere and they're being used for everything. Posting on social media, surfing the web, giving presentations, taking pictures, playing games, watching movies and charging customers for products are just a few of the things you can do on a tablet or smartphone. What *you* can do is figure out a way to reach the large sections of your audience who are using smartphones and tablets to engage with your brand or business. What are you waiting for? Your mobile audience is out there - go see what the future holds!

About WSI (We Simplify the Internet)

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

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