

The mobile landscape - looking at 2017 and what e-retailers could expect

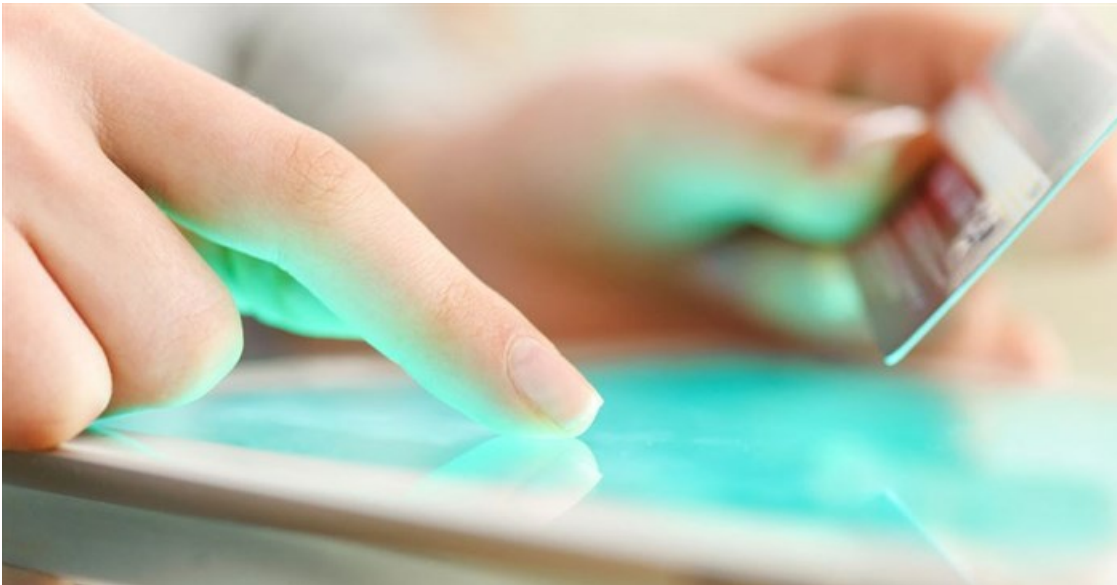
 By [Graham Du Plessis](#)

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Truth be told, we've been waiting for quite some time for the inevitable 'mobile boom' all the trend analysts, commentators and everyone in-between has been telling us about for the last six years.

Certainly the wait does not make their predictions wrong, albeit with the luxury of hindsight 'mobile first' to coin that lovely phrase, has been a feature in the more developed parts of the world for some time and finally, and I say it with the utmost relief, has reached our fair shores in South Africa (all the while evolving into something much grander in the rest of Africa due to the barrier of connectivity via mobile networks being less as opposed to your more standard internet).

From an online retailers perspective, mobile is hugely important and it would take a seriously naïve one at that (I include brick and mortar's here with an online presence) to not have made some efforts to beef up this particular platform.



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We all know Facebook (with Instagram in tow) have fully invested in mobile for quite some time and truly have become a mobile centric platform. Now we have Google's AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages), preferring mobile optimized websites over those that aren't in the search result and app indexing (listing search result for app deeplinks (just to name a few).

Now, with website properties being finally forced to improve the experiences on their mobile view by virtue of the above and by and not limited to smartphone penetration in the market, wider data coverage, higher volume of mobile applications being brought to market. Notwithstanding the very real evolution of daily life integrating with hand held devices. Let's not forget the #datamustfall movement starting to make waves to finally tackle the exorbitant prices being paid by users – this in itself is a huge motive to get things in order, mobile speaking of course.

A natural progression of advertising spend on mobile soon flows towards improved properties, which is entirely logical. I can remember a few years ago some major digital publications still did not have responsive websites, not even mobi sites at that, and those that did were really anything but a great user experience. No wonder cpm rates were extremely low and account executives just gave away these impressions as add value (hardly value).

Looking at the recent IAB South Africa Internet Advertising Report (2015), mobile revenue (or spend) has increased by 65% from 2014, to a cool R181m up from R64m. A way off from desktop but increase by close to a factor of three is something to take note of. I am very much looking forward to the 2016 stats.

With the above providing some context where does that really leave online retailers heading into 2017?

The battle of the app

Some quick stats to take this thought further; from the US market provides some insight & context into where things could be heading:

1. According to the latest Criteo mobile commerce report, the state of mobile commerce 2016, mobile apps convert 3x better than the mobile web browser with a 2x retention rate.
2. Comscores, the 2015 U.S. Mobile App Report - App users are 18x more loyal than mobile web browsers.
3. Internet Retailer's Mobile 500 (as per Branch.io) report shows that the top 100 retailers with apps have an average repeat shopper rate of 47.96% compared with the average 37.48%.

There is no secret here, app users are a much more lucrative audience than desktop and mobile, their basket sizes are higher, repurchase rates are higher, engagement is higher, intent is higher (installing the app is a massive indicator) and this audience will be fiercely fought for that is for sure. All the relevant online shopping sites now have had an app for more than a year, Zando, Superbalist, Spree for fashion, Takelot for all and sundry, Gumtree and OLX for user listed items even a brick & mortar, Mr Price. Let's add to the mix the out of towners, Wish – Shopping & Ali Express is to make for a crowded market.

Content focus

The space is filling up quickly and even with the positive growth factors to mobile usage in South Africa, the playing field is quite full (for now). I see the shopping app space looking to become more content rich providing the user with more than just a shopping option – ala Net-A-Porter, not full publisher mode of course, instead useful and pertinent content to the target audience looping back to the items in-store for purchase. Video via mobile is starting to show some results, it will still be quite stagnant until such a time the greater data networks are made more affordable to the average user.

A fluid customer journey

Avoiding the popular mantra 'right place, right time', instead the aim will be to provide a great experience across all devices and allowing the user to decide, which is tantamount to a shopper's needs and comes above all else. A user simply wants to access the platform when and how they want. The retailer's objective is to be there every step of the way. From desktop while one is at work, at a café, browsing at home to being accessible on mobile while one catches a bus, waits for a flight, walk around a mall. The experience at all touch points needs to be well, on point.

This means ensuring that should the customer have an account, it will be accessible via any device and synced to any device. Looking for a particular item on Google the user can click on an app indexed URL and go into the app to that product when on their phone just as easily as desktop or opening an email on the phone and clicking straight into the app (if you have it) without a hiccup, what about sharing a product link you like from desktop to a friend who happens to open it on email and has the app, surely it must go into the app as well? And visa versa, sharing app deeplinks, a user must be able to access from desktop.

In a nutshell, deeplinks are going to become the king of links (if not already).

Mobile advertising set to boom

As alluded to earlier, mobile spend saw a significant boost and this trend is not about to slow down. Particularly from a search and programmatic perspective these channels allow the advertiser to really harness the power of data and build numerous audiences to play to every part of its product offering – while I don't see those crummy mobile footer banners on sites leaving us anytime soon, I do think more creative methods to engage users will develop that play to their individual profiles. I have a sneaky suspicion mobile networks will play a bigger role here considering their data assets.

Looking ahead to 2017 will most certainly bring with it, its own share of surprises and innovations and here is one marketer that cannot wait.

ABOUT GRAHAM DU PLESSIS

Experienced digital and marketing professional, with an interest in ecommerce, product development and customer experience. Started in the martech environment before moving into the retail environment at Zando, rising quickly into the management space first as the head of mobile and then heading up the group's marketing initiatives. Currently at one of South Africa's leading performance agencies, Incubeta, managing a client portfolio within the financial and retail space.

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