

Dishing social media: Mobile trends in retail real estate

August 23, 2012 - Retail

Have you ever poked fun at a colleague, friend or family member that turned red and frantic after realizing they don't have their smartphone? Well, we now live in an era where this is a medical condition, and it's called Nomophobia. Ridiculous? Absolutely, but truth is, we most likely have all been there. I've recently been conducting a significant amount of research on marketing and social media trends in the retail real estate industry and the biggest trends are circling mobile technology. Given the fact that 91% of us have our mobile device within reach 24 hours a day we can all see how powerful this tiny device has become in our lives.

We are now using our smartphones to find out the weather, navigate to a shopping center, find out more information on an product of interest, scan codes to compare prices, pay for items, find the closest gas station, order food and plenty of others things. In fact, mobile traffic (smartphone and tablet) is now making up 20% of US web traffic. And smartphone sales (globally) are expected to increase by 25% from 472 million in 2011 to 630 million in 2012. Some mobile trends that I'm seeing in the retail real estate industry include:

1. The growth of mobile websites and applications. Due to the rising popularity of the smartphone, it is VERY important especially for a retailer, to have a mobile website based on search engine optimization reasons. As an example, if you have flash built into your site half of the users going to your site won't see anything except for a red x which makes people annoyed and they are more likely to click on someone else's business. The app industry has become a \$10 billion market growing at 100% per year. I've seen many retailers, especially fast casual restaurants, create mobile apps and they seem to be doing well with them. In fact, the food and drink category has gotten so strong it was just added as a category in the Apple app store.
2. Integration of food review sites. One of the best examples of this is Apple's Siri on the iPhone 4S. When asking Siri "What is the best restaurant in [town name]" she responds with "I found a number of restaurants ...21 of them are in [town name]. I've sorted them by rating". Siri pulls this information from Yelp. Ways to help get your business noticed is to create a Yelp page if you don't already have one, complete a Google Places page and get people to write (honest) reviews!
3. Mobile Payment. You've probably seen retailers like Starbucks incorporate a mobile payment option. There are other options available and some still in the works including, LevelUp, PayPal, PayPal Here, Square and Intuit GoPayment. These payment options are convenient for the customer and in some cases, the businesses save money on transaction fees.
4. Geo-fencing. This is a virtually created perimeter for geographic areas. This is somewhat new and is being used by shopping center owners to electronically "fence" their properties online so that when someone is physically within the perimeters, they will receive information about the designated center and its retailers. Note, this is not an app.
5. QR Code scanning and NFC (Near Field Communication). I've been seeing more and more QR

codes and Microsoft Tags on leasing signage in vacancies as well as on products in retail stores. The next wave will be NFC where you will no longer need an app to scan codes, it will be built right into phones making the user experience even more convenient. The iPhone 5 is rumored to encompass this function

Random Mobile Fact: There are more mobile phones on the planet than there are TVs.

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