Pizza Hut's Global Chief Customer Officer Dishes on the Benefits of a Mobile-First Approach

The former Walmart and HP executive also talks about the future of voice

ARTICLE

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After launching its mobile ordering app in 2009, Pizza Hut has made strides in the mcommerce space, constantly listening to customer feedback and adapting accordingly.

Not one to shy away from new channels and technology, the pizza giant teamed up with Amazon a few years back—as the smart speaker space was heating up—to launch an Alexa skill, giving consumers a way to order food without having to lift a finger.

We recently spoke with Helen Vaid, global chief customer officer at Pizza Hut, about the ways consumers in different markets interact with the brand's mobile app and site, as well as what the company learned from releasing its Alexa skill.

Pizza Hut is a big player in the mcommerce space. How are your mobile efforts evolving as consumer habits, along with the proliferation of new technologies, continue to change?

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It all started with designing for the mobile-first customer. Then, it expanded to a larger screen size, as opposed to designing the experience for a large screen size and shrinking it down.

We found that our more frequent customers tended to return via mobile. So, we put the app at the very front and center of our thinking and strategy.

What percentage of your customers are accessing you through mobile?

There are so many markets that we operate in, so it definitely varies. There are markets where probably a third of our customers are interacting on mobile, and there are markets where more than 90% are.

Are you finding that more consumers are accessing you through a mobile site as opposed to a mobile app? If so, is there any marketing that you're doing to convert them into an app user?

A movement to an app happens on one of two variables. In one case, the market may be much more app-centric simply because the infrastructure there isn't good enough for people to browse on the mobile phone. Therefore, the offline mode of the app really helps the performance and how people operate it. A lot of Latin American markets actually fall in that category, which is why Brazil is such a heavily app-driven market.

On the other hand, there are markets that are very driven by mobile web, because a lot of folks would download your app only if they're extremely loyal and use you repeatedly. To me, a consumer giving up real estate on their phone—even though, frankly, these days most people don't mind doing so—can be an indicator of how loyal they are to the brand.

Whether people are app-centric or mobile-web-centric, we try to design something that ultimately works as beautifully on the mobile web as it does on an app. Yes, the app probably gives you more capabilities that are native to the device and therefore a bit more seamless. But in today's world, you can easily navigate mobile web as well, because the new generation of devices allow you to do that.

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Designing for mobile is far more important than focusing on whether activity occurs via an app or not. If the market demands it, then you do it. If the market is more web-led, then absolutely focus on that.

You must be looking at a flood of data. How are you using it to inform your business decisions?

It's very important to us that all personalization data is done with the appropriate privacy requirements in place. With GDPR [the General Data Protection Regulation] and CCPA [the California Consumer Privacy Act], it's important that our customers are aware of what information they're giving us and what we're doing with it.

From a marketing perspective, there's probably a lot of information we have that we can utilize to give customers more relevant experiences—that's what they're looking for. They don't want us to send them five different communications that are all competing with each other. By having that information, we can deliver fewer communications, instead of inundating them with messaging that they don't find helpful or useful.

And again, different markets are at different stages. There are some markets that are very advanced and others that are trailing and learning the baseline. That's a good thing. We've actually found the data has helped us raise the floor and break the ceiling, so to say.

Frequency of messaging is certainly top of mind for most marketers. How do you find the right balance?

There are a lot of different models today that can help you decide a good communication and contact strategy. In our more advanced markets, we typically think about this as a classic RFM model (recency, frequency and monetization). If customers come to you frequently and they spend a good amount of time engaging, you may send them different types of communications from what you send to customers who come infrequently. It all depends on the segmentation model that you build within your teams and markets.

Shifting gears, a trend that emerged in 2019 was voice. We expect that channel to continue growing this year, and it's a

channel you've been investing in. What have you learned since your Alexa skill launch?

Voice is one of those channels that is definitely going to grow in importance over time. Today, it's probably a channel that customers like experimenting with but isn't their go-to.

For us, right now, voice sits in the innovation bucket. It's really about experimenting and allowing your more mature users to interact with you across any channel they choose. It's very important to iterate and learn from these early adopters so that we can improve over time—because the capabilities of voice will also improve.

What's on your road map for 2020?

We have to be able to build capabilities in our customer department that support three stakeholders: our consumers, our team members and our franchisees. Our plan today is to address all of these stakeholders in varying degrees and make sure that we offer relevant experiences that are very easy and distinct.

This is going to be an exciting year for us as we go from being just consumer-focused to doing a lot more to make our overall business digitally native.

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