Mobile is ever-present no matter what market you look in now. This was the opening statement to panelists at the recent round table looking at mobile technology and the rise of disruptive technologies that the mobile revolution has supported. Discussing issues surrounding the customer experience and the use of mobile technologies, especially SMS, in sectors that have only just begun to realise the power of text messaging to enhance their offering and streamline processes within their organisation.

OpenMarket is a mobile technology company that helps enterprises communicate with employees and customers over the medium or channel of SMS. Given that there are now five ways to communicate using mobile technology – phone, SMS, email, apps and social media – the company prides itself on helping customers understand which is the right channel for a particular message. As David Senior, executive director for retail at OpenMarket, said: “Right message, right time, right channel. We’ve got 15 years’ experience understanding SMS and knowing when that is the right channel over the others. SMS is considered an old technology, but there are seven trillion messages sent per year. I understand the value in getting the right message across at the right time, and SMS messaging is the only way to communicate with everyone – not everyone has got Twitter, not everyone has got your app. But there are six billion people on the planet to communicate with.”

Paul Murphy, OpenMarket’s commercial director Europe, set the panellists some themes to consider during the discussion. “I think it is always a very easy thing to underestimate the power of the mobile device. We have a lot of experience with a lot of companies and when we ask ‘What’s your mobile strategy?’ or ‘How do you use mobile?’ I have to say there isn’t many that give me a good response. Quite a few think what I am asking is ‘Do you have an app?’ However if you look broadly at apps – low download rates and app fatigue are two pertinent points. App downloads are at around 15 per cent for the big boys and you’ll probably only use it 1.6 times.

“I guess one of my questions to you is do you use mobile? Do you have any views on how it could be used or how it is use?”

“I’d also like your thoughts on offerings such as Uber. The logistics industry I think could face a very disruptive

Meet the panelists

David Senior, account director – retail, OpenMarket
Peter Ward, CEO, UKWA
Paul Brooks, managing director, BiS Henderson Academy
John Fitzgerald, managing director, EDC gmbh
I understand the value in getting the right message across at the right time and SMS messaging is the only way to communicate with everyone.
Logistics Manager editor Malory Davies considered the question of delivery flexibility: the ability to tell the delivery company closer to the final mile stage for the customer to say ‘I won’t be home when you say you’ll deliver, please deliver my goods here instead.’ One example of this starting to happen is John Lewis, where you can order in store and give a delivery location, but change it later for delivery to a local Waitrose for click and collect.

Ward questioned whether people actually take advantage of engagement opportunities. “The model of receiving a text message to say when a delivery will arrive – my question is how much of that is one-way traffic? And, is it really interactive because when you get a message saying ‘we are coming at 11 o’clock’ well actually if I’m not going to be there at 11 o’clock is there a mechanism to say I don’t want it then I want it somewhere else?”

Murphy gave an expert reply: “Usually there are two messages – one the night before which gives you your opportunity for feedback, for example leave it with a neighbour, put it in the porch etc. That’s when you get your interactivity. The message ‘I’m an hour away’ – infiltigate as it were – there is no room for feedback. In our experience, in terms of interactivity, it’s very high – higher than any other communication channel. It’s not quite 99 per cent but it is higher than any other channel.

Citing a real-life example, Brooks detailed: “I placed an order with a well known retailer, using their chosen delivery route. I was given a leadtime, not an exact delivery day – that wasn’t an option. This morning they sent me an SMS, which I couldn’t reply to, to say they are going to deliver it sometime today! And I’m thinking ‘good luck, I’m in London’ – as a consumer that’s hacked me off.”

Stocker posed the question: “When you are looking at disruptive technology it’s not always about technology itself also about process. How do you engage?”

Brooks discussed one way of orientating the delivery mechanism: I suppose the question is can you engage with the consumer at all points to the point where you can say we can make a difference – can I deliver anything to any location for collection at any time? So if I specify I want to pick this up at No. 36 Blackburn Rd, Manchester, we need to make it happen – that would be truly innovative and very customer facing. But how do you make a home real-time address, a delivery address? Because actually total flexibility is what we’re looking for – it’s got to be possible. But it’s not industrial scale – it’s the final mile.”

One example of how mobile could help manage queries effectively was automating a high volume process for customers. Murphy gave more details. “We worked with a company’s call centre to create a process for pin resets – at the time they were taking roughly 2,500 calls a day for that, taking about five minutes at a cost of a few pounds per call in a busy call centre. We set up a two-way SMS process for them that customers could use and it has made a real difference. All customers really want is to pick up the phone and get their issue sorted out and put the phone down. A couple of years ago there might have been some other interaction about when you are and that sort of thing but now you don’t need it.”

With all of the discussion involving disruptive technology it was good to have an international view provided by John Fitzgerald, managing director at German media and entertainment logistics provider EDC GmbH. Originally from Australia, Fitzgerald has been based in Germany for many years and sees the market as being hesitant to embrace disruptive technologies. “Germany is in most things a late adopter market. When I first came to Germany you couldn’t pay for anything with a credit card – they are very critical of anything and there are a lot of second guesses. There is a very big contract logistics market, and Amazon and similar companies are very prevalent but they go through the mill for new offerings – for example drones and which areas will they be allowed to operate in.

“They are very sceptical about these types of models; are they sustainable and are we going to have air traffic issues. The University of Braunschweig are currently working on building a carplane – a James Bond sort of thing – how would you get approval to fly it if you have one of those. You can’t just drive along the autobahn and take off! Germany is not a very adoptive market and they are very cautious however consumers need their products, they need better service and there is still a lot to do.

“In entertainment product there seems to be a real need for people to say ‘I want it in a couple of hours.’ To avoid mis-deliveries and similar Deutsche Post puts a piece of paper in your letterbox saying ‘it’s left with a neighbour’ or ‘please pick it up’. Technologies such as interactive text messaging, sending a text message so that you can say I’m late, I’m not going to be home in time can you leave it in such a place’ or be able to give customers options. I think the consumer is becoming more demanding and definitely in bricks and mortar logistics companies there is big room for improvement.”
“SMS is the most frequently used aspect of the mobile phone, beating voice, email & mobile apps”

(Yankee Group)

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