Let's Put the Native App versus Mobile Web Debate to Bed: Mobile Web is the New Digital

Anyone else tired of the native app versus mobile web debate? I sure am, and one of my 2015 resolutions is to simply stop having that discussion. So let's run through the facts just one more time before we put it to rest.

We've all heard people call 2014 the "year of mobile." (Ok, I also admit that if I hear the phrase "year of mobile" once more time, it is probably one time too many!) But there are no denying the fact that for the first time in the U.S., adults spent more time with tablets and smartphones than with desktop computers or laptops. In many countries, such as India, mobile search queries actually exceeded desktop queries. And the fact that there are some 5 billion mobile devices out there today, compared to only 2 billion PCs.

So if last year was the "year of mobile", I believe 2015 may be about the "disappearance" of mobile. With mobile getting so ubiquitous, it should pretty much disappear from our consciousness, at least from a consumer perspective. In other words, mobile is becoming so much a part of the fabric of our lives that we hardly even notice it. Differentiations between going online via "desktop", "tablet" and "mobile" are soon going to sound pretty quaint. The assumption is that we are, by and large, accessing the digital world from our mobile devices. And when we talk of digital marketing, we will pretty much mean the mobile web. Mobile will increasingly *become* digital.

What does this have to do with the app versus mobile web war? Well, when you think of the digital world this way, it also helps put to rest some of those tired old arguments.

Let's look at the facts. There is no question that for consumers, native apps remain popular and useful. Consumers are used to accessing a group of select apps on their mobile devices for entertainment (content and gaming), social connection (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), messaging (WhatsApp, Line, SnapChat), and utility (Mapping/Location, weather, banking). Savvy marketers also use these apps to engage this audience further, whether that's to entice us to download new apps, re-engage with apps we've already downloaded or simply for brand recognition.

But the audience for most apps is limited and the fight fierce among companies seeking to be one of the select trusted apps that users turn to. [Data from Nielsen shows us that the average number of native apps used per month has not changed much at all since 2011](). As the number of native apps has exploded to number in the millions, consumers just don't use more of them consistently. As such, naturally there is an aggressive competition to be one of those half dozen or so native apps used monthly. This is a fight most will not win.

In particular, content publishers have fewer compelling reasons to put all their eggs in the app basket. Native mobile apps can be expensive and resource-intensive to create, manage, and promote. And in many cases, both large and small content publishers receive significantly more (10X to 20X in some cases) traffic via their existing websites than from those who engage with their apps.

Thus for most content publishers, the "native app versus mobile web" discussion is, and has been, mostly a waste of time. Web-only publishers gain the majority of their traffic from search and social media referrals, rather than from users engaging with an app. Reaching their digital website audience is a far better model for them to distribute and rapidly monetize their content. And as more readers use mobile devices, it's obviously smart to focus more on the mobile web.

The ubiquitous mobile web will change us all. For consumers, it will change our behavior as we continue to find, discover, and engage with content on websites, but now on smaller screens more often. For companies and content publishers that grasp that digital is now really mobile, and create strategies accordingly, it will create exciting challenges and opportunities in the year ahead. So as you ring in the New Year, I propose a toast of sorts….. Let's stop the debate about mobile native apps versus mobile web, and instead focus on how mobile is now the new medium of choice for digital media, for publishers and marketers alike.

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