



Developing a Mobile Strategy for Colony Brands, Inc.

Project Sponsor

Colony Brands, Inc.

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Executive Summary

When the iPhone was launched into the market back in 2007, it signaled a change to how users would be able to interact via their smart phone. The iPhone provided a friendly user-interface to play games, download music, share, and engage in other on-line activities which until then had not been experienced in this channel. Although the first commercial launch of a mobile-specific browser can be traced back to Japan in 1999, it was not until 2006 that one began to see firms like Orbitz adopt mobile as a new channel to their consumers. Today, 8 out of the 10 largest retailers by revenue in the United States have a mobile site. Mobile websites are not a trend. Rather, they have emerged as an alternate channel that businesses are beginning to adopt as part of their go-to-market strategy. In this project report, we analyze the mobile website features, attributes, and best-practices across key retailers in order to identify the right mix of features that Colony Brands should consider when launching mobile sites for Midnight Velvet and Ashro.

In order to provide a comprehensive analysis on leading retailers, we assessed each of their mobile sites across three different mobile platforms; Android, Apple, and Blackberry. Our objective for evaluating different platforms was to identify any differences or features that varied across the three leading smart phone operating systems. It's important to note that while Apple is one of leaders in the smart phone category, in the last two years Android has gained over 1/5 of the market share in the U.S. With this in mind, we found it was critical to learn what (if any) emerging trends were taking place by across this new operating system. We found the differences across platforms to be minimal. Nonetheless there were certain functionalities and features that differed across these platforms that we point out in the report.

The criteria we used to evaluate each of the sites was divided into 6 key areas ranging from functionality to customer reviews. In each of these areas we evaluated various features and identified "must haves" from each mobile site. Our goal was to assess where each of these retailers were delivering on the customer experience, differentiating across competitors, and what their limitations were. By performing this assessment, we identified features and attributes that Colony Brands must offer and consider in order to avoid falling into some of the limitations that were observed. It was surprising to learn that Wal-Mart, one of the world's largest retailers does not allow its customer to make an actual purchase via their mobile site. Instead customers and users alike are encouraged to visit their main website and register to create profiles.

In addition to the competitive assessment, we also gathered data via an online survey from existing Colony Brand customers who engaged in online shopping. The data allowed us to hone in on key stakes that were specific to the Colony Brands' customers and gain insight to their attitudes/behaviors related to smart phone usage. From this analysis we identified the importance of features like sharing online that play a vital role in driving purchases via mobile.

One of the recurring themes we saw across retailers' mobile sites was an effort to improve the efficiency and experience between cross-channels. Being a multichannel direct marketer, the emergence of the mobile channel therefore presents both a significant opportunity as well as challenge for engaging and serving customers in a seamless manner across the various channels.

Acknowledgements

This has been a great opportunity to obtain hands on experience with a successful multichannel retailer such as Colony Brands. Our team is honored to work with such a renowned company. This experience has been very rewarding because our productive research will aid Colony Brands in developing their mobile strategy.

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