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“Lack of segment focus of the sales channels is one of the biggest barriers to people buying mobile products”

Up close and personal with your customer

Creating customer value doesn't happen in isolation. Companies must get close and personal to target customers through research and including them in the design process

There is no doubt that personalization in product and service delivery is one of today's hot topics. Personalization answers people's deep need to reflect and reaffirm their individual beliefs and values, or in some cases their belonging to a group.

Over the past few years we've observed and interviewed hundreds of people in their homes, at work and followed them around in their social context, in order to have a better understanding of the role of mobile phones in people's lives and to uncover innovation opportunities.

One thing that stood out was how almost everyone personalizes their mobile phone to some degree, with ringtones, wallpaper or themes being the most common form. In fact, it's one of the first things people do when they get a new phone. We've seen countless teenagers exchange ringtones of their favorite songs, set their wallpaper to pictures of themselves or loved ones and install cartoon or video game character themes. And personalization is not limited to tech-savvy teenagers. Interestingly, we saw many

non-tech-savvy older adults set their wallpapers to a picture of someone close to them, although most often with the help of friends or family. That could represent an untapped market.

Before companies start developing yet more mobile products and services for everyone and their mother, they should get a good understanding of who they are targeting, and what these customers want. This may seem obvious but look at service providers and content developers in the past few years. With a "create-it-and-they-will-come" attitude they invested heavily on purchasing and developing a vast array of mobile products and services, much of which in the end almost no one uses. By trying to provide something for everyone at the same time, they end up appealing to almost no one.

With mobile content, the key to success lies not only in identifying different target segments and understanding what constitutes value to each of them, but also in understanding what they are willing to pay for — there are some things that people value

greatly, but would not want any other way than free.

Offering the right value is only the first step — it needs to be delivered. Lack of segment focus of the sales channels is one of the biggest barriers to people buying mobile products. And that's not to mention poor usability. How many times have we seen people try to use mobile portals and give up, saying "this is not for me?"

Designing portals that cater to specific segments' needs is definitely a step in the right direction. But the envelope could be pushed even further by providing individual, unique channel experiences.

There is immense potential to attract and retain more mobile customers by allowing them to personalize portals to their individual needs, thereby creating a stronger emotional connection.

But even with the best of intentions, creating and delivering customer value doesn't happen in isolation; it requires getting close and personal to target customers through research and including them in the design process. **C**