

Fashion Made Easier

Rue La La optimizes its mobile application

by KAREN M. KROLL

Nearly one-third of smartphone owners planned to use their phones to make a purchase during the 2013 holiday season, according to Deloitte's 2013 Annual Holiday Survey. Even more — 47 percent — said they would use their phones to gather information about potential purchases.

At members-only fashion site Rue La La, 40 to 50 percent of transactions come via mobile, says Gerry McGoldrick, vice president of marketing — and that number spikes to 70 percent at times. As more consumers use mobile devices to shop, successful retailers need to ensure they're doing all they can do make their mobile applications intuitive and user-friendly. McGoldrick says these have been priorities in designing Rue La La's app.

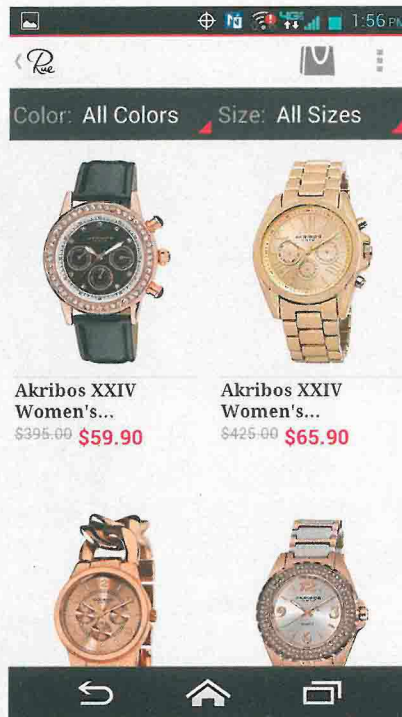
Rue La La is constantly testing variations of the mobile app to see what resonates with customers. Even small changes — moving the location of a button or changing its color, for instance — can have a big impact on sales.

ANALYZE, OPTIMIZE, PERSONALIZE

Mobile app developers need the same sort of analytic and reporting tools that long have been available to website creators. Even as mobile apps have proliferated over the past few years, however, the tools and infrastructure to support them has been lacking, says Bob Moul, CEO of Artisan Mobile, a developer of mobile experience management tools.

"A lot was still being done manually in mobile," Moul says. Making even a simple change could require re-writing the code, submitting the new version to the app store and then waiting for customers to download it — all of which might take weeks.

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VICES to conduct transactions, "doing things manually won't work," Moul says. "It won't keep up with the speed of mobile."

Rather than building tools that require a developer's expertise, Artisan aims to "automate and simplify these functions," he says. "We want to put the capabilities in the hands of business users."

This becomes more important as companies demand more of their mobile apps. Until recently, many apps were at about the same place websites were 10 to 15 years ago — many companies launched apps because they knew they needed them, but weren't exactly sure why.

That space started to mature in 2013, Moul says. More companies

began asking themselves what they wanted to accomplish with their mobile presence, and then built apps to try to achieve that. In the coming year, Moul expects more companies to try to optimize and drive as much revenue as possible through their apps.

As they do, Artisan aims to help them. The company's Mobile Experience Management platform currently offers three solutions. Artisan Analyze offers the ability to analyze the performance of a mobile app, allowing businesses to "understand how users are engaging with the app today," Moul says.

For instance, a restaurateur whose mobile app requires customers to navigate five screens to arrive at the point at which they can make a dinner

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reservation might watch for the point at which most customers fall off.

Artisan Optimize allows mobile retailers to conduct A/B testing: They can change an app, and then watch how it influences traffic and purchasing by comparing traffic and conver-

publishers and travel firms. Companies in many sectors are trying to boost the performance of their mobile apps, but “retail is leading the pack,” Moul says. “They’re the ones trying to drive the most revenue through the mobile channel.” Many

while another group receives a revised version. The company then measures change in clicks and conversions between the two groups. Through its testing, Rue La La has found that even modest tweaks can have a sizable impact on clicks and conversions.

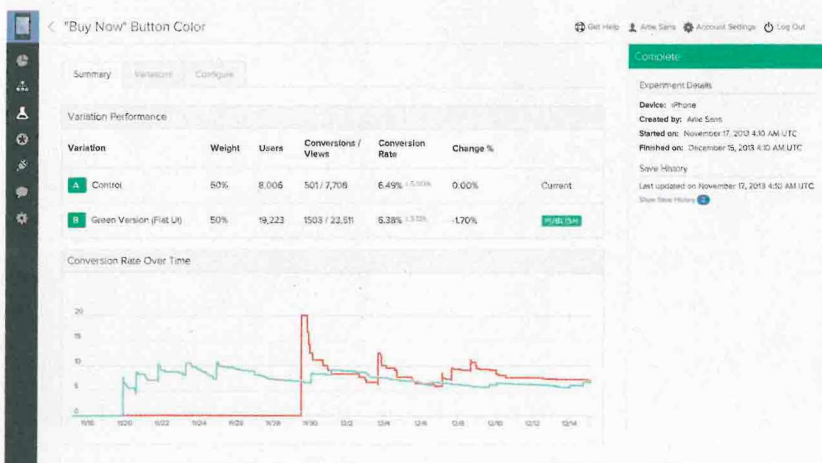
Implementing one of the tools requires installing Artisan’s software development kit within the mobile app. After this, the company’s mobile app generally needs to be re-submitted to Apple for approval. (Artisan also is available for Android devices.) Once approval is received, a retailer typically can set up an A/B test in about an hour. It then can begin working with Artisan’s analysis tool to gain information on mobile customers.

Moul says that the data Artisan collects is aggregated, anonymous and encrypted. Artisan doesn’t know consumers’ names, although it may be able to let a retailer know that a particular customer is, for instance, a female from the southeastern United States and between the ages of 25 and 45.

Rue La La signed a deal with Artisan early last summer and was testing the application a little over a month later. In fact, part of the solution’s appeal was its “light technology integration,” McGoldrick says, adding that the easy user interface was another selling point. That’s in contrast to some solutions that are “tech-heavy and time-consuming.”

Since Rue La La has begun using the tools provided by Artisan, the portion of sales coming from mobile has jumped from about 33 to 45 percent. “I can’t say it’s all Artisan, but Artisan has been a big part of our strategy as we put more focus on mobile,” McGoldrick says. **STORES**

Karen M. Kroll is a business writer based in Minnetonka, Minn.



sions among customers who receive the changed app with the same statistics among those who had the earlier version. So, if the Analyze solution shows customers falling off once they reach a particular page, the retailer can make various tweaks to the page and watch which ones drive the greatest numbers of click-throughs.

The third tool, Artisan Personalize, lets retailers tailor their app to different types of customers based on past shopping and buying habits, enabling a mobile app to “become a dynamic environment,” Moul says. “You can customize the experience.”

For instance, if a retailer notices that women in Chicago tend to buy more handbags on Friday afternoons, it can send these customers a promotion timed to this sales trend.

PERFORMANCE ENHANCEMENT

While Artisan works with a range of companies, its focus is on retailers,

have realized that their apps provide an opportunity to engage customers in ways that weren’t possible before. While tweaking a website so that it sort of works on a mobile device is a start, “it’s not what the leaders are doing,” he says.

Rue La La has moved beyond simply having a mobile app to focusing on ways to enhance its performance. The company has used Artisan’s Optimize solution to tweak its “buy now/shop now” button, changing its position on the page, as well as its color and size. Rue La La also has conducted tests with the sizes of its images, its font choices and the amount of copy contained within a page.

Rue La La also uses Artisan’s Analytic solution to measure customer impact of changes to certain functions, including its call to action. “We use Artisan to dig deeper,” McGoldrick says. It will send one group of customers the original version of a message,