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Chance for record labels to engage

No marketing allowed near the venue

Decca turns to SMS

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Case Study

Decca tests contextual mobile marketing

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Abstract

As the largest classical music event in the world, the Proms offers a significant opportunity to engage with music lovers — but only if strict marketing rules can be respected. This case study explains how music label Decca trialled the new mobile contextual marketing service offered by Weve and discovered a new route to market.

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Classical music lovers at the Proms

The Proms is the largest classical music event in the world, rightly famous everywhere from Austria to Australia. With more than 70 concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall and many other nationwide outdoor events spread over 3 months, it is attended by the world's largest and most concentrated group of classical music lovers — a relatively affluent audience with a proven interest in both live and recorded performance. For record labels such as Decca, whose world-renowned artists such as Daniel Barenboim and Mitsuko Uchida draw large international crowds, the Proms represents one of the biggest potential marketing opportunities of the year — a chance to engage with an audience at its most receptive in a manner that is both highly relevant and contextual.

Reaching that audience, though, is far from straightforward. With an average age of over 55 years, they are slow converts to the digital world and tend to be cynical about technology when it comes to their listening habits. Few of them buy music on Amazon or routinely download digital files, making many conventional digital marketing approaches unsuitable. To make things harder, the nature of the Proms itself presents some unique challenges. Labels and artists are prohibited from selling CDs anywhere in the vicinity of events and are not allowed to operate in any way within a certain distance of the Albert Hall — not even to distribute flyers near the Hall's intimidating number of exits, a tactic that has limited value even before design and distribution challenges come into play.

One avenue, though, seemed to be worth exploring — mobile. Even the least technically savvy Proms visitors carry mobile phones, giving Decca an opportunity to approach them directly via text message. The very simplicity of text messages makes them powerful tools for engaging older audiences, and they are widely embraced across all

demographics — 98 per cent of SMS messages are opened and read, according to recent data from YouGov, compared with only 29 per cent of tweets and just 12 per cent of Facebook posts. Sending text messages to the right people at the right time, then — the very essence of contextual relevance — might well be a good way for Decca to engage with its core target audience. ‘We had a real opportunity to use technology to solve a real-world problem’, says Gavin Bayliss, marketing manager at Decca. ‘We know that it can be scary out there for older listeners and we thought we could really help them’.

Sending highly tailored messages

Finding the audience

To help find the right demographic and target them in the right way, Decca chose Weve, a joint venture between mobile phone companies EE, O2 and Vodafone created to solve many of the current problems with mobile marketing and advertising. In addition to very accurate data about audiences and their interests, Weve also has very precise data about devices. This is coupled with the ability to set up specific geo-locations, allowing it to send highly tailored messages to individuals within a specific area — a perfect scenario for Decca in its bid to appeal to Proms-going classical music lovers.

Location-driven artist information

In conjunction with Weve, Decca designed a campaign that would reach the right people in the right place at the right time. On the first two evenings of the Proms, it sent carefully designed text messages to smartphone owners in the immediate vicinity of the Royal Albert Hall, inviting them to click through to a web page where they could download seven free music tracks. Each message was tailored to the evening’s event, referencing the Decca artists appearing that night, the expectation being that audience members might well have a specific interest in particular performers as well as the music.

Short-term shortfall

Seeing the results

The results from the first two evenings were unspectacular, to say the least. The combination of a relatively small-capacity venue and a very tightly focused locational geo-fence resulted in the delivery of just 45 messages, yielding just two click-throughs — both on the second evening. Undeterred, Decca and Weve immediately set about tweaking the campaign parameters, exploiting the power of the Weve platform to make significant changes in a very short time. ‘We needed to act very quickly’, says Bayliss. ‘If we’d just let it go for a week before we looked at the data, it could have turned into a bit of a disaster’.

Extending the geo-fence

Within 24 hours, geo-fencing was extended to include:

- local travel hubs where Prom audiences would gather around the time of the concerts, especially the nearby tube stations of South Kensington and Kensington High Street;
- an overlay of known classical music lovers, derived from Weve’s audience platform;

- refreshed message content to make it clearer that free content was on offer.

The result was an immediate and dramatic improvement, both in the number of messages delivered and in the response to them. Delivered messages immediately jumped to more than 2,500, with a peak of nearly 4,000 in the middle of the campaign — several orders of magnitude greater than on day 1. Just as significantly, the click-through rate greatly also improved, up to 1.5 per cent within a few days and an eventual peak of over 2.5 per cent. Perhaps most importantly of all, the click-to-conversion rate reached 70 per cent — an 80 per cent increase and a vivid illustration of the power of mobile to reach and engage with even the hardest demographics.

Learning the lessons

Reacting in real-time

Bayliss says that Decca learned many valuable lessons from its first venture into mobile marketing and contextual relevance, not least the importance of acting quickly. ‘You need to watch campaigns like a hawk and make sure you’re always ready to tweak and make changes’, he says. Therein lies the real power of digital — the ability to react in real-time to the audience’s response. This in turn means working closely with your partners and their tools — in this case Weve and its contextual platform, which enabled Decca to respond with the speed and agility needed to turn the campaign around.

Technology to solve a problem

For Bayliss, though, the benefits run deeper than mere metrics. ‘A lot of our customers own smartphones, but not many of them really use all the features they’re capable of’, he says. ‘We’re really happy to be able to hold the hands of our customers on their digital journey. We gave them something really useful and simple without giving them too much to worry about’. But this isn’t a universal panacea, says Bayliss, and it needs to be used carefully. ‘The right way to do this is to identify a problem that the technology can solve, not try to find an excuse to use it’.

Top five tips for successful contextual mobile marketing

1. *Know who you are talking to*: ensure that the audience you want to engage is the right one in the right place.
2. *Get the messaging right*: the tone and content of the message needs to resonate with the audience and be revised in real-time if it does not do so.
3. *Set the bar low when trying new methods and models in new media channels*: innovation happens in small steps, not giant ones.
4. *Stay nimble and engaged*: make sure that campaigns can be monitored in real-time and revised very rapidly if necessary.
5. *Focus hard on the contextual elements*: right time, right content, right place really does reap the right results.