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MS Tag in the marketplace



Microsoft endorses Tags

Towards the end of 2009, Microsoft plans to incorporate bar codes into its Xbox videogames as part of a broad marketing initiative. "[Bar codes] enable advertisers to continue their conversations with consumers across any media [whether] posters, book covers, store displays or screens," says Mark Kroese, general manager of entertainment and devices advertising for Microsoft.

A pilot was held at Wal-Mart in early 2009 publicize the release of an Xbox game called "Halo Wars," the retailer created tag-enabled store displays.

Consumers who scanned or "snapped" the tags with their phones were taken to a special Web site where they could pre-order the game and get freebies like ringtones.

Microsoft found that 85% of the people who visited the site ended up downloading content onto their phone.

"Games are a natural place to put tags. You've got people who are really engaged, leaning on the edge of their seats ... a tag campaign presents advertising in a way that lets gamers "stay in the moment," says Kroese.

The technology will appear in most of the 10 Xbox titles Microsoft plans to release this fall. Advertisers include operator Sprint Nextel, which will use tags in a campaign on Xbox LIVE.

Gamers are likely to see the tags in the same places they currently see regular ads. In a first-person sports game, for instance, players might see a billboard or a banner on the side of racetrack with a tag.

Snapping a tag with their phone will yield some kind of reward, such as an outtakes reel of a movie, a phone wallpaper or entrance into a sweepstakes or contest.

The bonus could also relate to the game, such as a clue, extra gamer points or special admittance to a secret level.

"There's a currency system that gamers understand, such as points, achievement and secret levels," says Kroese. "We want the tags to be part of the fun instead of a blatant interruption."

Tags won't be limited to new games. Using an in-game advertising platform developed by Microsoft's subsidiary, Massive, marketers could place ads with tags in existing games.



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Microsoft

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Microsoft SQL Server 2008

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“**Bar codes enable advertisers to continue their conversations with consumers across any media.**”

Nor are tags limited to game play. Microsoft plans to put them on game marketing materials, including packaging and posters, and even incorporate them into the release of Windows 7 in late October.

Microsoft's Tag product team says several companies outside the tech industry will roll out tag campaigns in late 2009.

Proctor & Gamble will employ the technology to promote its Head & Shoulders shampoo, fans of US basketball player Kobe Bryant will be able to snap Bryant's tag-enabled shirt to learn more about the athlete.

Lionsgate films will also engage in an MS Tag campaign for the release of the movie "Gamer" showing exclusive footage from the film.

Planning for the Future

Accenture and Microsoft Corp. have launched an initiative to help retailers tackle the challenge of linking consumers to emerging technology platforms such as social networking and online communities.

Under the multichannel retail initiative, Accenture and Microsoft will work with Avanade, a global IT consultancy created by Accenture and Microsoft, to help retailers extend the shopping experience to an ever-widening number of locations and devices, including the Web, mobile computing and new ways to shop in stores. This will let retailers deliver a wide range of services and products across every channel in which consumers interact with retailers, including mobile.

"In the current economic situation, one of the things we're hearing from retailers is that driving consumer loyalty is a high priority, and mobile is a convenient channel for consumers," said Brendan O'Meara, managing director of worldwide retail industry for Microsoft, Redmond, WA.

"Especially during an economic downturn, it makes a lot of sense for retailers to make sure they're driving an increased share of a consumer's wallet," he said. "With increased market share, they'll be better positioned as the economy improves. "This initiative is geared toward driving convenience and loyalty for retail customers."

Consumers can buy a product online or via mobile and pick it up in-store.

Retailers are able to display products on the wired and mobile Web sites to enable comparison shopping while in the store.

Also, retailers can let consumers use their mobile device to get more information about the products they offer.

"A retailer has many different choices -- they can give consumers price points from different retailers and make a best-price guarantee, giving consumers the knowledge that they're getting the best possible deal," Mr. O'Meara said.

"Mobile is really emerging as another important channel in terms of how retailers and consumers interact -- it's really taking off.

"We have the ability to provide a full experience from a Microsoft Commerce Server-enabled Web site to reach out to and address customers in new ways," he said.

"It's important for retailers to have the ability to handle the various mobile scenarios that are emerging and that we believe will become more broadly deployed."

Adding mobile into retailers' mix will enable them to cut costs for the consumer and improve customer service by providing tighter integration between the in-store or online shopping experience and line-of-business applications.

“ Microsoft believes that mobile will continue to grow in importance for retailers.

"Retailers are continuing to evolve toward tightly integrated cross-channel operations and will be making significant investments in technology, infrastructure and organization over the next two years to implement this strategy," said Chris Fletcher, analyst for AMR Research, in his report titled "The State of Cross-Channel Operations: 2008."

Microsoft claims that its investment in digital advertising platforms, consumer mobile devices, search, social networking and online content helps retailers and consumer goods companies connect the dots in their cross-channel strategies.

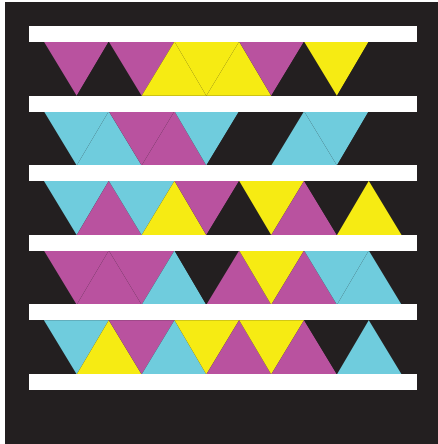
"For retailers, mobile advertising will become increasingly important," Mr. O'Meara said. "We have a new technology called Microsoft Tag, a colorful 2D bar code developed by Microsoft that can be read on mobile devices."

Consumers can download an application from Microsoft that will run on Windows Mobile devices, Apple's iPhone and other smartphone operating systems.

The camera phone on a consumer's handset decodes the 2D bar code tag, which includes an ID number that references back to a Web service allowing the retailer to serve content to consumers such as text messages, v-cards, direct advertisements and video.

"The creativity of the marketer is the only limit," Mr. O'Meara said. "This gives advertisers the ability to connect the digital world and the analog world.

"The closer connection with the consumer will enable retailers to cut costs and improve customer service by providing tighter integration between the in-store or online or mobile shopping experience"



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