



Shopper Insights in Action

July 11-14, 2010 • Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile • Chicago, IL

Hello and welcome to our Shopper Insights in Action 2010 podcast series. I'm Melissa Sundaram, Online Producer for the event and this year we've invited a few of our speakers to chat with us before we meet in Chicago. We do hope that you enjoy our series and that you'll join us at this year's event. We'll be in Chicago at the Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile from July 11- 14, 2010. Visit www.shopperinsightsevent.com for more information.

We had the pleasure of speaking with Colin Hynes, Director of Usability at Staples.

Melissa Sundaram: Could you tell us a bit about your role as Director of Usability? What are your responsibilities within Staples?

Colin Hynes: Sure. My role as the Director of Usability at Staples is far-reaching. We look at the experience that the customers are having, so that includes our physical stores, our websites, our catalogues and really any touch-point that they come in contact with and more and more these days that's starting to include mobile. We also do a lot of work with our associates. Some of our associates are very very close to our customers when they are in a store; we have associates that are on the floor that are helping our customers make decisions and helping them with any questions that they may have on the phones a similar interaction. We also have corporate associates as well, who are trying to understand the data that is coming in and trying to making sense of things and using systems internally to try to, a little more in an extended way to helping the customer experience. So when we're thinking usability, we're not just thinking how well does the website work and is it easy for people to use but what are all of those touch points and how do they contribute to making a great customer experience because they all, somewhere down the line some are more closely connected to customers than others and some are a few hops away, they all to contribute to that greater experience that we would all like to provide to our customers. So, I'm in a fortunate position as the head of usability at a company who's motto is "That was Easy" because that's something that, I think, every usability person dreams of – having a company that is so focused and so committed to making the experience for customers. So that's the scope of my role at Staples.

MS: Tell us a bit about your session, what attendees will get out of it by attending and why you feel this conversation is important this year?

CH: Sure. Well I think people have been using personas for a fairly long time. And one thing that I've seen with personas, and we've used them for a number of years is that they seem like a good idea at the time for folks. So they go in with best intentions; but often times they do a lot of work on the personas, and if you do them correctly it does take a fair amount of effort and thinking and costs often times to come up with you think are the right customers you should be focusing on and writing portraits and these sorts of activities. But what often happens is at the end of this cycle is that people are left with these beautiful looking, glossy, shiny profiles of their customers but they don't know what to do with them and they look



at them and say “That’s great, now what?” So what I’d like to bring to the session is showing the audience what we have done with personas over the year and how we have evolved them so that we are able to quantify the value that they have to our organization and the activities that they are performing and where we can make those activities easy and better for our customers. There is a lot of optimization that can happen, but to optimize for the customer experience, for the business as well, you need to know what’s happening with these personas and you need to understand orders of magnitude and I think that that’s something that is often not visible to a lot of folks that are using personas. Okay, yeah we know we have five personas and we know that these are the general activities that they do but how many of these personas are there out there and how do we understand that and within each of these personas what are the places, what are the touch points that they are having with my brand and where are the places in that experience that we should optimize and which of those parts of the experience are going to be the ones that are going to yield us the best return on our investment when we try to focus in on the things that we try to prioritize with our limited resources and limited time. So we’ve done a number of different personas for both our retail stores and also for our online properties – and we’ve actually even done them for our catalogue as well. And I’m going to talk about a couple of approaches that we’ve taken and the different ways that we’ve quantified those personas. But more importantly, what I want to get across is the ways to make personas actionable by quantifying them. Some of that is understanding the data, but frankly some it is really a more socialization type of activity where a lot of times you need big numbers for people to feel comfortable and confident in taking dramatic actions. And it’s often very difficult when you work in the sort of qualitative research field, as I do to convince somebody who owns a P&L to make a potentially large financial outlay and something that is going to have a potentially great impact to them on their bottom line or top line with eight people or ten people or sixteen people – it’s a risk. I think people feel better, and in many cases they should, when you have big numbers. And from a science perspective, from a stats perspective, with qualitative research you generally don’t need big numbers but sometimes knowing your organization and knowing what’s going to make people have that confidence level, that’s as much of the persuasion mechanism as the information itself. So that’s another sort of spin on the conversation that I’m going to have at the conference.

MS: What aspects of the event are you looking forward to most and why – networking activities, chatting with fellow speakers, attending other sessions, keynotes?

CH: I think it’s all that the above. I do find that going to these conferences is great way to almost serendipitous learn things. So I often times don’t going in with “I’m going to go here, go there, I’m going to learn these five things.” I often feel like it’s one of those experiences where you just have to be open, open your mind and let things in. And I find that that’s the best way to learn sometimes. I’ve had some very powerful moments at conferences where I will go into a room where there is a lot of vendors displaying their wares and traditionally if you’re a big retailer sometimes you might shy away from that because you feel like you’re going to get the “hard-sell” and I like to open my mind to those things, to actually embrace them and really understand what’s out there – there are so many great ideas that really can work. We have analytics at Staples from the web because I bumped into somebody from a technology company called Four Metrics and that was something that really spurred us on and got us thinking and it was just an eye-opening experience that got the ball rolling. And the same thing happened to us last year at The Shopper Insights conference where we were talking to some vendors about virtual planograms and virtual stores and we probably got a few calls about that and we said “No we’ll return the call some other time,” and then really saying “We’re going into this to really understand what the landscape is out there and there might be ten things that we see out there and eight of those make



absolutely no sense for us but at least we've experienced them in a sort of hands-on way and those other two we may want to drill in on more. And that's something that we've particularly found with The Shopper Insights in Action conference that's been really valuable to us and it really even changed the way that we do research and get insight by embracing these technologies and we really owe it all to going to Shopper Insights in Action. And I think that beyond that, it's just the level of the breadth of the experience that you're laying out – not just focusing on the in-store experience but all touch points. And I think that's really important because there's a lot of conferences out there that have a very particular focus, like mobile or internet and that's great if that's the specific world that you live in. But its not for us, its not the world that our customers live in. And I really like the idea that we're going to be looking at the 360 degree sphere of influence because it is truly at every touch point that you're customers are experiencing your brand and the presentation that I'm going to make is going to talk very squarely about that and talk about "Well how do you know what your customers are doing after they leave your website or before they get to your store?" So I think it's a perfect fit for the kind of topic that I'd like to talk about and also like to learn about. Because every day we're thinking "How does mobile impact things? And how does the store experience potentially augment the mobile experience and how does mobile play into what's going on in-store and what are people using the web for versus what do they use the in-store kiosk for?" And all of these really complicated questions; we are all looking for insight on so I'm really looking forward to these great minds who are going to be at shopper insights to really help us move along to better understanding.

Again, our thanks to Colin Hynes for participating in this year's Shopper Insights in Action podcast series. We look forward to meeting them and you at the event. Don't forget, visit www.shopperinsightsevent.com for more event details.