Google

Dictionary.com uses Google's ad network across platforms as mobile business continues to see strong growth

About Dictionary.com

Dictionary.com is the world's largest online and mobile dictionary. With more than 50 million unique users worldwide, Dictionary.com allows people to access millions of word definitions, synonyms, spelling, audio pronunciations, example sentences and translations anytime, anywhere. Dictionary.com evolved from the premier word discovery source online to word discovery everywhere by expanding to multiple mobile platforms such as tablets, ereaders and smartphones.

• www.dictionary.com
• Oakland, CA

Goals

• Leverage mobile to make it easy for users to access Dictionary.com's educational content when and where they need it
• Create a sustainable and profitable business while maintaining a great user experience

Results

• Over 30 million app downloads as of April 2011
• Mobile traffic is growing 4x faster than online
• Engagement levels on mobile are nearly 3x online levels

Dictionary.com started in 1995 as an online dictionary but has evolved into a cross-platform word discovery and learning tool. With more people accessing the web from mobile devices, Dictionary.com launched their mobile website in November of 2007 and now sees 9 million unique users per month. The company has since added an iPhone, Android, Blackberry and iPad app with more than 30 million downloads as of April 2010 making Dictionary.com the world's most downloaded mobile dictionary. Lisa Sullivan-Cross, GM of Mobile for Dictionary.com provides the following insights into building a successful business on mobile.

Ad networks complement direct sales as mobile business grows

As more users were accessing Dictionary.com's website from mobile devices, it was natural to build a mobile specific website to optimize the content for the smaller screens. As Dictionary.com focused on understanding the mobile use case and improving their mobile site, the company was able to easily generate revenue from the beginning through ad networks such as Google's Adsense for Mobile Content.

With Dictionary.com's expansion into apps, ad networks such as Google's AdMob provided a monetization solution while the company learned how to incorporate mobile advertising into its direct sales efforts. Lisa Sullivan-Cross explains, "ad networks have made it easy to monetize our mobile assets from day one. As our mobile apps and mobile web user base grew, the direct sales team began to incorporate mobile ad packages into their proposals. Ultimately we believe just like online, both direct sales and ad networks will co-exist and complement each other as ad inventory scales."

Create a user experience for the mobile context

Building an engaging mobile experience requires more than just porting desktop content to mobile. Dictionary.com provides a clean, easy to navigate user interface on mobile web that only contains the key features most important to a mobile user. For the mobile application, the company is always looking to incorporate the unique capabilities of the mobile device to enhance the user experience. For example, recognizing that mobile users look for a word or definition in the precise moment they need the information, the company added features like voice-to-text, which enables a person to speak a word into the mobile device and quickly see the definition on-screen. By understanding how and why users engage with their content on mobile versus online, Dictionary.com is able to tailor the content and experience by platform keeping users engaged with their content regardless of what device they have with them.

"Engaging with our users on multiple platforms enables us to create stronger relationships as they can always access our content."
— *Lisa Sullivan-Cross, GM of Mobile*

Diversify business model on mobile to appeal to a broader user base

Dictionary.com started with a free app in order to achieve scale, so the ad supported business model made sense. As their user base grew the company found they needed to expand upon the single business model approach to satisfy the needs of different customer groups. Lisa points out, "feedback, reviews, and ratings showed that users loved our Dictionary.com app. However, our power users conveyed their willingness to pay for an ad-free version. We quickly responded by creating a paid ad-free version, giving the users choice. This resulted in both a new revenue channel and decreased negative reviews on our free app, boosting it's rating."

Build scale by starting with a great user experience

Above all, Dictionary.com believes in creating a great app experience that adapts to the needs of its users, therefore pays close attention to user reviews and solicits user feedback from within the app. Then, to build scale, Dictionary.com uses these tactics:

- **Brand recognition:** In crowded app marketplaces, it is important to find ways to stand out. By building a trusted brand online, Dictionary.com found that users embraced their mobile app.
- **Getting featured:** By offering compelling features that best leverage the user interface of each platform, Dictionary.com was featured in app marketplaces and ranked amongst top apps in user voting contests.
- **Cross promotion:** The Dictionary.com website, mobile web, and other apps in the portfolio are great places to advertise the latest mobile app for free.

Test and iterate

As mobile continues to evolve, it is important to stay flexible, be willing to experiment and pay close attention to user feedback to support the iterative process of creating the best user experience. Recently, Dictionary.com looked to improve monetization by experimenting with AdMob's rich media ad formats. These high value CPM ads can be videos or interactive websites that the user can either engage with while in the app or close and return to the app. While monetization is important to Dictionary.com, they value users even more. Therefore, it was important to slowly integrate these formats to gauge user response. Lisa comments,"As we roll out rich media ad units, we keep our users and their preferences top of mind, as we do not want to detract from their experience. The great news is that these innovative and creative rich media ad units have been very well received by our users, garnering high click through rates as the ads themselves are offering value for users."