

Red Ant case study:

Topshop for iPhone

Summary

The mobile experts at Red Ant and the in-house digital team at Topshop have created an award-winning multichannel iPhone app. The fully transactional mobile app brings the entire Topshop product catalogue to customers and actively engages with them in-store, at home and online.

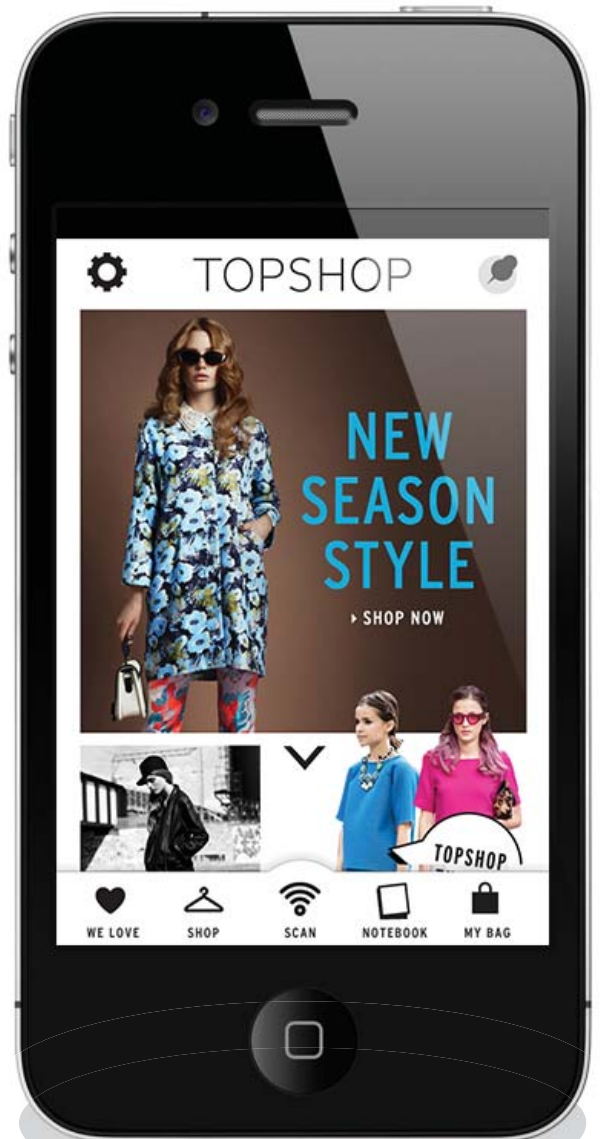
Available on the
App Store

Background

Topshop is one of the UK's leading High Street fashion retailers. With more than 300 stores in the UK and over 300 new products per week, Topshop has a growing international presence which sees deliveries to more than 100 countries via its website.

Topshop has earned a place at the table of the heavyweight industry influencers as a fashion authority through its commitment to being ahead of the fashion curve, its support of emerging British design talent and innovative designer collaborations.

'Topshop is for fashion enthusiasts,' says **Kate Walmsley**, Topshop's Head of E-Commerce. 'Our customer base is incredibly diverse, engaged and tuned in. They're not afraid to customise their look, to play with it, and have a bit of fun – an attitude the brand actively supports.'



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Mobile approach

Topshop's knowledge of its customer base and their interaction with the brand was key to its decision to enhance its mobile presence.

The audience for Topshop's digital offering is unified by a number of elements:

- they are active mobile users
- they expect to have access to the brand whenever, wherever and however they choose
- they see shopping as a social event – discovering, sharing and discussing their finds

Given its customers' enthusiasm for brand engagement and sharing experiences at every opportunity, it was a straightforward decision for Topshop to extend that experience to mobile.

'It was never a question of whether or not we would do it – but what we wanted it to achieve', says Kate.

Why choose an app?

True to its brand, Topshop wanted to develop a solution which had its customers at heart, and a constant focus on providing them with mobile tools which would deliver:

- a fully transactional platform
- a great shopping experience, on- and offline
- the ability to access fashion insight and products 'on the go'

With an established online presence, Topshop chose to complete the transactional circle with a native iOS app.

- The app offers a fixed piece of real estate which encourages regular repeat visits.
- Apple's App Store offers a well-defined marketplace for promotion
- It has the ability to offer offline browsing on the customer's handset
- Opportunities to join up instore and digital experiences
- The platform allows for a more creative approach to functionality, interaction and for smooth campaign integration
- It offers scalability and lends itself to iterative development which leads to continuous improvement
- There's inherent flexibility and room to grow – an opportunity to innovate with fresh functionality. For

example, there's greater potential for personalisation and customisation. First and foremost, the app had to be truly useful and serve a real purpose, ensuring users would keep returning to it because it makes their lives easier and improves their shopping experience.

'We wanted to build our app on solid, practical foundations – ones which we could use as the basis for our mobile roadmap for the future', says Kate.

Key considerations on the path to development included:

- acknowledgement of the customer's desire and ability to shop by offering a mobile optimised shopping experience
- the need to complement the execution with an experience and design that is on brand and of the highest quality
- a "shoppable" app featuring the full product range
- clear KPIs and a measurable return on investment
- the importance of an engagement layer to enhance the core shopping journey, appealing to the customer's social behaviour and playfulness with the product

Multichannel opportunities

Topshop has a very strong High Street presence in the UK, and it is in an ideal position to exploit multichannel opportunities.

To support this strategy it was clear that the app needed to have relevance both instore and in the customer's own environment. 'After all, the content which surrounds our products exists in a number of mediums, not all of which are instore,' says Kate. 'And mobile is the conduit to that information – from product inspiration, to reviews, sharing, store availability and more.'

In effect, the app needed to be a tool which would give ready access to specific content which would enrich and add value to the user's experience in a way which would bring together Topshop's instore, online and mobile channels.

Choosing the right partner

Topshop invested a lot of time in finding the right strategic partner for the project in Red Ant – testament to the team's commitment to getting its app proposition right and future-proofing the strategy.

'We were entering new and unproven territory, and, from previous experience, we knew that we needed a partner, not just a supplier – one with technical capacity and the ability to deliver our vision', says Kate. 'In our search, we generally found that there were two types of supplier - one was heavily marketing-led, strong on creative ideas but without sufficient technical capability, and the other was far too tech led, without insight into the market or customer behaviour.'



'What we needed was a collaborative agency with a complementary skillset. One that would bring together our brand knowledge and vision for the proposition, with true market insight, sound technical expertise and the ability to deliver and provide ongoing support. Continuity was vital for the project, so we were looking for a long-term partner – and Red Ant delivered on all those levels.'

Project approach

From project inception, Red Ant and Topshop worked closely to develop a roadmap focused on business and customer needs which would form a solid, transactional foundation for the future.

'We wanted to take the time to get it right,' says Kate, 'and the way we worked together with Red Ant was flexible enough to let us adjust our timescales in response to the reality of the build. The one thing we didn't want was a 'me too' app designed just for the sake of having one. We learned throughout the process, pre- and post-launch, and when customer feedback gave us guidance on providing a better solution, we listened and implemented it.'

Competitor analysis

Key to the development of a 'best of breed app' was an honest appraisal of what's already out there, both in fashion retail and cross-industry.

The team assessed a number of factors in the apps to establish what 'worked' for customers, including

- Layout
- Checkouts
- Calls to action
- Quality of user experience
- Breadth and depth of the feature set
- Brand parity and equity

'We wanted an app with style and substance, form and function - not just a series of visuals that look good but don't 'do' anything', says Kate.

Low-impact development

Topshop's back-end technical team is under constant pressure to make sure the business runs smoothly. It was vital to ensure that the app development had as little impact as possible on technical resource and infrastructure, with a minimal requirement up front.

'What made the difference for this development was the tremendous will on everyone's part to make it work,' says Kate. 'There was a high degree of co-operation and collaboration between the Red Ant and Topshop teams, with virtually no disruption.'

The tech teams at Topshop and Red Ant worked together to implement robust mobile technology:

- Integrated with existing eCommerce, mCommerce, analytics, social platforms and third-party content providers
- Completely flexible and future-proofed platform for new developments

As for the technical details:

- Catalogue data is collected daily via a proprietary scraper, and packaged into an optimised format for faster downloads and lower bandwidth usage via Red Ant's Content Acceleration Server
- Checkout is provided via embedding and restyling the existing web layer
- Stock checking is handled by background calls to the desktop website
- Configuration, catalogue and content is hosted remotely for maximum flexibility – most changes can be made without needing an App Store approval cycle and update
- GPS co-ordinates are sent to a custom API for store location

App delivery

Red Ant and Topshop delivered a customer focused, feature-rich iPhone app:

- Fully transactional, based on Red Ant's Colony Mobile platform
- The full product catalogue is available and product updates occur daily
- Barcode and QR scanning, location awareness and optional content areas to bridge Topshop's on- and offline marketing activities
- Enhanced instore and social engagement features including sharing and favourites to encourage stickiness and positive word-of-mouth
- Close collaboration with the in-house Topshop team to ensure their completely bespoke design retains Topshop brand identity, whilst preserving iOS familiarity
- Digital and social media channels (blog, videos, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, one-off campaigns like London Fashion Week) are drawn together in one place - the app is a one-stop-shop for Topshop updates
- Multiple versions support different markets, such as the United States
- The Topshop app was designed to improve on the user experience of other fashion and shopping apps, and to add value in a unique, industry-leading way:

- Unlike many apps built on an mCommerce platform, the app was designed from the ground up to represent Topshop's unique brand equity whilst respecting iOS design conventions
- It hosted the live streaming of catwalk shows from Topshop's Showspace at London Fashion Week in February 2012
- Features such as saved sizes and multiple browsing views save the customer's time and promote purchase conversion

True market insight, sound technical expertise and the ability to deliver... Red Ant delivered on all those levels.

Kate Walmsley, Topshop's Head of E-Commerce.

Results

The new app received a very warm welcome from the press, the industry and, most importantly, the customers:

- Over half a million downloads in the first six months
- Average 4+ rating on the App Store
- Winner of Retail Systems 'Mobile Retailer of the Year' Award 2012
- Regularly appears in iTunes UK's top 10 lifestyle apps and top 100 overall apps
- Featured by Apple as "New and Noteworthy", "What's Hot" and in "Great Free Apps"
- Launch of mobile site and iPhone app has doubled UK mobile device sales mix

Blogger Reviews:

"This incredible app allows users to shop and browse from the Topshop product catalogue. Users can stay ahead of the trends and be kept in the know on all aspects of their beloved fashion brand, as the app contains regular updates. A fantastic feature allows users to scan barcodes in store to share with friends via Social Networking sites or to check the availability in other stores. Users can also find the nearest Topshop stores, follow the popular blog and save their favourite items, which can then be shared."

Yiota Orphanides, iPhone App Café

"The Topshop iPhone app is one of the best designs I've seen to give a similar experience across multiple ecommerce channels"

AboveFunction

"The TopShop app is really well done. Really slick experience considering its a high street name."

Luke Beard, Designer

"When I downloaded the new version of this app, I was so delighted. It portrays an exciting, high fashion and unique fashion brand and create a simple product purchasing experience. It is everything the Topshop customer desires and everything that they could ever need. A big congrats to Red Ant, the Topshop app developers who have done a brilliant job in bringing Topshop's vision to life".

Victoria Magrath, The Mobile Shopper

"This kind of engagement is particularly important within the current climate, having a close and meaningful relationship with customers is one of the few ways to retain business and develop advocates of your brand. Topshop has given its clients a reason to download their app including a variety of different situations in which it can be used."

Creative Brand Marketing

"Just shopped from the updated Topshop app, absolutely AMAZING! So so so impressed! :)"

The GladRags

"Topshop is an excellent app for anyone interested in fashion - especially if you've an aversion to shops. Despite containing lot of information there, the design is simple so it's very easy to navigate and the wealth of items available is staggering...Topshop is one of the best shopping apps we've seen."

Hannah Bouckley, Recombu

"High street retailer Topshop will also be live-streaming several shows via its iPhone app...one of the best resources for following London Fashion Week."

Hannah Bouckley, Recombu

"Amazing app - completely and utterly addictive. The blog section is amazing to keep up to date on how to wear current trends and the shop section is so easy to use to buy said trends! I love the notebook where you can store your favourite items for buying later on. A must for every fashionista out there."

App Store Review

Thinking about going mobile?

Mobile is clearly a force to be reckoned with when it comes to enhancing brand awareness, engagement and sales, and a route to market which deserves serious consideration. According to Kate Walmsley: 'Brands looking to develop an effective mobile presence need to understand what the customer wants and how they're going to use it - this will inform the route you take when it comes to features and content. Then, of course, you need to find the right partner - Topshop took several months and saw many potential collaborators before choosing to work with Red Ant,

because they have the right skillset to complement our own. Finally, you need to be willing to be flexible - your mobile app will never be 'finished' - it's a case of continuous improvement to keep up with customers, technology and the industry as a whole.'

Plans for the future

'We're delighted by the reaction to our app,' says Kate, 'and we're keen to build on this success by delivering more features and an even better experience to our customers. Thanks to our long-term relationship with Red Ant, we're confident

that there will be great things to come from Topshop mobile in the future.'

