

STOP WITH THE ZIP FILES, PULEEZ!

OK – you’re in the music business and it’s 2018. You also, like over 95% of phone users world wide use a smartphone, and are a regular user of your favorite apps on that phone. Your friend tells you about a cool new app for editing music or a terrific new video game, and you go to the App Store and buy it. Then you find out that instead of sending you the app you bought, they’re sending you a file you have to de-code. And if you’re able to de-code it, then you have to figure out how to get the app installed on your phone. Why? Because, you know, you’re tech savvy and why should the company that made the app have to worry about how you receive your app? After all, they’ve got your money and this is a “self-service” world, so what’s the problem! Get to work! You can do this!

The End of Zip Files

If you think this is either outrageous or far from the truth, you haven’t purchased download music lately outside of the main distribution platforms like Apple, Amazon or Google Play. Meaning, that you haven’t had the pleasure of purchasing music only to discover you’re being sent a Zip file, or worse yet, you’re getting a set of manual download links. Either way, the assumption is that the seller can take your money and dump the files your way, and you do the work to sort it out and get the files where they should go so you can play the music you just purchased!



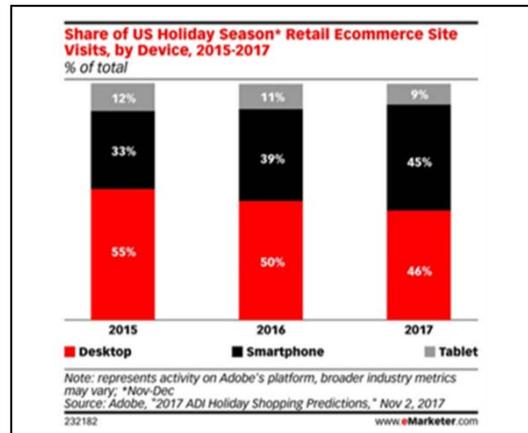
How did we get into this mess? Well, there probably was a legitimate reason once upon a time when computers didn’t handle big files well, internet connections were slow, etc. Then it made sense to compress files to try and expedite transmission. Now, however, that’s no longer the case. Today the problem is compounded by the “do it yourself” mindset. Everyone can record and edit their own music, build their own web sites, download their own apps, etc. So why shouldn’t you also be able to handle music files dumped via Zip file? Well, first, is the matter of propriety. If you’ve just taken money from a fan, you should want that fan to have a great experience so they’re happy and on their way to becoming a super fan! Second, if you’re dumping Zip files, you’re out of touch with the current marketplace and what the standard expectations are. **Zip is not hip!** So, let’s take a look at the dynamics at work in today’s marketplace and what the expectations are.

The Mobile Migration

Undoubtedly you use a mobile phone – who doesn’t. So, you shouldn’t be surprised not only that you are among the majority, but also that your cohort (that is, all of you who use mobile phones) have developed certain practices and expectations.

eMarketer has published some compelling data in the past month about user practices and mobile trends. Lets start with their data about e-commerce site visits by device.

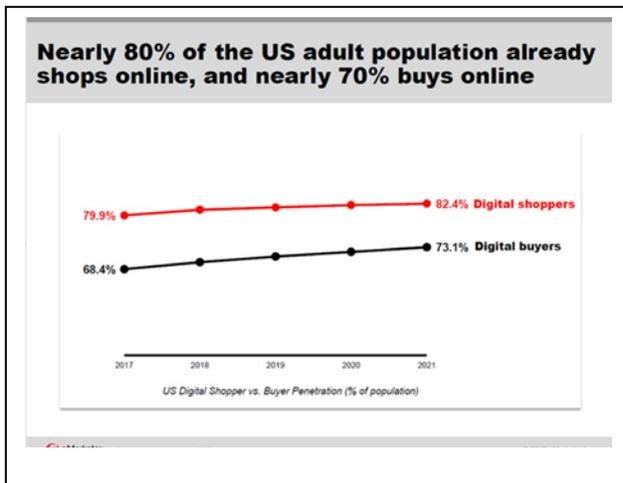
The table at right shows actual data from 2015, 2016 and 2017, and it shows consistent change in one direction. The percentage of visits to e-commerce sites on desktop devices is going down year on year from 55% to 46%. That's an 18 percent drop across the period, which is a lot! Tablets have dropped too, a few points, but what has grown is smartphones, going up 12% for the period – that's a 36% increase from the base back in 2015. That's a whopping change! And, the first question in your mind should be: "what have I done on my web site to adjust to this?"



If you've invested to make your web site mobile friendly and accommodate mobile devices as well as desktop devices, then that's a good start. However, is that enough? No. You've got to have a direct channel apart from selling albums and merchandise at live performances, and that means a web store on your site where you are selling at full retail. And, it not only means a webstore that is mobile friendly, but because you should be selling physical and digital product (CDs, vinyl, MP3 downloads) in your store, you need a delivery mechanism for digital files that doesn't default to dumping a Zip file on your fans when they spend their money with you!

Is mobile ecommerce growth for real?

If you wonder about this, look at yourself. When was the last time you purchased something using your smartphone or tablet? Yesterday? The day before? Last year eMarketer published the following data showing that worldwide nearly 80% of adults shop online, and that nearly 70% are buyers – i.e. they actually make a purchase online. That info on the left below didn't take into account the type of device: it was all devices.

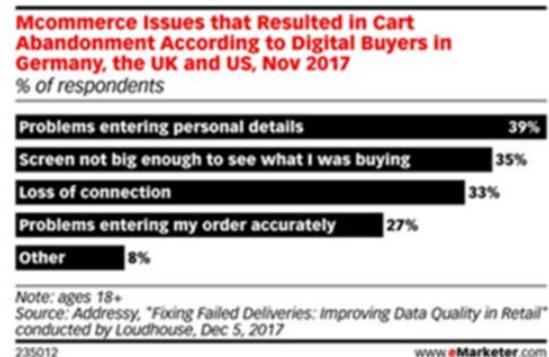


Now look at the new data on the right, published in January, 2018 documenting the change in mobile ecommerce (Mcommerce). Not just has retail Mcommerce grown by almost 40% from just under a trillion dollars to 3.55 trillion, it now makes up almost 73% of total ecommerce sales. That's why major retailers have either revamped their web sites or plan to do so in the coming year. This is where the action is migrating, and you have to be there too.

The importance of User Experience

OK – so the customer base has migrated to mobile platforms (and especially smartphones), and Mcommerce is becoming dominant. A major dynamic goes along with that, and it's user experience (UX in technical jargon). Originally that meant designing for a positive user experience, and at core it still does. However, it's come to mean something else in our fast changing tech world.

Specifically, that is the simple fact that the measure of positive user experience is no longer in your control. There are so many web sites and so many web stores and so many apps and so many video games and so many online surveys, etc., etc. that users now have a basic expectation of what makes up a positive user experience. And guess what goes along with that? Low tolerance for bad user experiences and the consequences that go with it!



Look at eMarketer's data above from February 2018 about abandonment rates measured last November. They list the reasons for abandonment.

- **Problems entering personal details at 39%:** that can be as simple as poor web design in your shopping cart or not making it simple to set up an account and/or log in.
- **Screen not big enough to see product at 35%:** you might want to blame that on the customer (as in "use a bigger screen!") but Amazon, for one, has figured out how to do it!
- **Loss of connection at 33%:** that's certainly something you can't control, but it is something you can anticipate and do everything possible to make sure you are optimized for slow wi-fi. It also makes the point about why streaming isn't the end all. People don't always have great wi-fi!
- **Problems entering my order accurately at 27%:** autocompletion by smartphones should help with this over time, but page design is important here too.

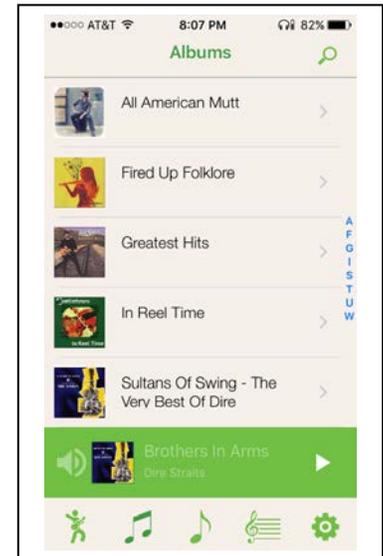
What's the final take away? The old adage is: "the customer is always right!" And if you start there, you have to take ownership for the user experience your fans have on your site. If it's not somewhere between great and stellar, then you just arranged to have your brand reputation damaged, and you did it to yourself!

Is This where Apps Come In?

In a word, yes. The reason is that when you are interacting with a customer via an app, you are able to control a lot more of the variables. Remember, most web site and web store customer interactions happen in a browser, and not only do browsers vary in how/what they do, but neither you nor your fan can control the browser.

For instance, one reason for dumping music files using a Zip file is that your store doesn't know what platform your customer is using. That used to be the case, but smart ecommerce can detect the type of platform and act accordingly. When you have an app on the customer side, especially when it's on a mobile device, you've installed the technology you need to assure a great user experience. For music delivery you need a Windows, Mac, iOS and Android app on the customer side to be the download manager that receives the purchased music files and saves them to the correct folder so they're ready to access and play after download.

A well designed music app for mobile devices also has a built in player that acts like an MP3 player (remember how an iPod or a Zune device used to work?) and shows purchased music by Artist, Album or by Song. It also has Playlist capability so your customer can build custom playlists.



These are all components of assuring a great user experience when you sell digital music files from your store. For grins lets look at what a bad user experience is like when you're selling digital music files. The first thing is not telling your fan what they're going to get. Ask yourself: if you were told you were going to get a Zip file that you'd have to "extract" would you go through with the purchase? A lot of people don't even know what a Zip file is. And when they get one, they don't know how to "extract" the files from the Zip? And then they've got to figure out where to save them--and for Apple and Android devices a third part Zip handling app is required and then Apple devices won't let the files be saved on the mobile device! How's that for assuring a bad user experience? Some musicians even go so far to decide to send WAV files instead of MP3 files because they're "higher quality." The problem is that the fan may not care, and WAV files don't have meta data tags that include cover art, track names, etc. So not only does the fan have to convert the file from WAV to MP3, they have to deal with adding the meta data to the files if they want to play them in MP3 players.

Creating a great user experience when selling music

The case we'd make is two fold. You need a high function web store that's designed for selling music and merchandise. Why? Because selling music isn't like selling widgets! Albums are sold in physical or digital formats, for example. You also need to be able to sell merchandise, and things like clothing are more complicated than they appear because they involve gender (male/female), size and colors – those are product variants. And it all starts with offering your products in an easy to navigate design with store technology that makes it easy to buy!

Now we get to the music part, and that's key because this is a band or musician web site, you're trying to build a fan base, convert as many of those fans into super fans, and sell as much product at full retail as you can while you're at it. And if you give your fans a great user experience they will not only support you because they're fans, they will keep supporting you because the message your site sends is that you care enough to assure they have a good user experience.

So what do you have to have?

- High function ecommerce to sell physical and digital
- Apps for various platforms that assure fast delivery
- Mobile apps for Apple and Android to assure files get delivered and are ready to play when they get there!
- Mobile apps that include full MP3 player functionality so that they can be played, fans can build playlists, etc.
- Some nice extra features like wi-fi transfer to help your fans manage their music library.
- No ZIP Files!



Good user experience assures happy fans. Today's reality is that the minimally acceptable user experience for selling music is set not by us, it's the user experience that customers have come to expect from Apple, Amazon and Google Play: you buy it, you get it, you play it! That's it! Fans shouldn't have to extract files, name files, save files struggle to find files, etc. **Buy It, Get It, Play It!**

Slow loading content kills the UX

We've made the case that Zip files are a thing of the past and musicians shouldn't be delivering music that way if they want to build a dedicated fan base. We've also pointed out that the vast majority of

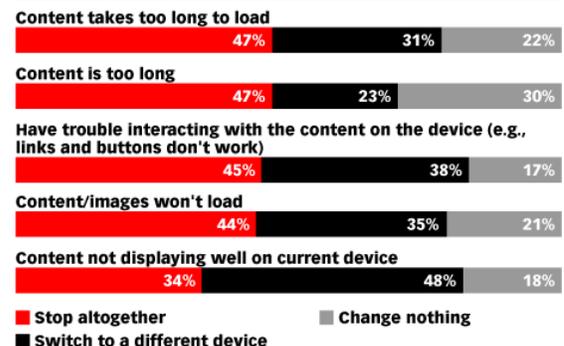
Scourge! That's a powerful and negative term. And it matters because so much of this interaction takes place in a browser and is dependent on the user's internet connection – two things you have no control over when you're selling in your store let alone when you're downloading content.

So, look at this data where nearly 80% of adults said they would stop viewing content or switch devices if it takes too long to load or is too long, or they have trouble interacting with content including won't load or display.

This focuses on videos, but it applies to music files just as much.

Actions Taken by US Digital Device Users After Experiencing Select Problems When Viewing Content on a Device, Dec 2017

% of respondents



Note: ages 18+ who use digital devices such as desktop/laptop, smartphone or tablet

smart phone users do some shopping on their mobile devices, so that has to be planned for as well. And we've made the case about the need for and value of a mobile app. Now, listen to this from eMarketer: Despite all the technological advances that digital publishing has achieved over the past two decades, slow-loading content remains one of the industry's biggest **scourges**."

Consider this from the eMarketer study: The problem of slow-loading content is particularly acute in digital video. A spring 2017 study from video analytics firm Mux found that 85% of respondents stopped watching video when it took too long to load." Video files are the largest, music files are the next largest, and then come picture and text. So, the message here for music file deliver is about optimization. Make it as efficient and seamless as possible, and that includes accounting for slow wi-fi connections, browser variability and doing as much in as app (where you control many variables) as possible.

So, to say it one more time: not only does user experience really matter, the benchmark user experience is the one set by the Big Guys! Our job is to provide fans the type of user experience that they've come to expect from Apple, Amazon and Google Play: you buy it, you get it, you play it! That's it! Fans shouldn't have to extract files, name files, save files struggle to find files, etc. **Buy It, Get It, Play It!**

Do that and you're far more likely to deliver a super user experience, and in the end that's key to a successful direct channel where you sell more at full retail, as well as converting fans into super fans!



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THE FAN EXPERIENCE