



About Virgin Mobile Middle East & Africa

- Regional consumer mobile services provider
- First Mobile Virtual Network Operator to launch in the Saudi Arabian market
- www.virginmobile.sa

Goals

- Position Virgin Mobile as a digital innovator and primary choice for KSA's connected youth in a highly penetrated and competitive telco landscape
- Drive new mobile subscriptions

Approach

- Adopted an innovative market entry strategy with digital advertising and social engagement contributing significantly to the overall marketing mix
- Promoted a number-booking service using digital advertising and social, whereby customers would register online for preferred numbers and pick up SIMs from retail outlets, using a click-and-collect model

Results

- Achieved significant brand awareness in the target youth segment
- Google advertising contributed 71% of bookings from all digital advertising, at only 60% of overall digital budget
- 80% lower cost per lead on Google Search than any other digital platform
- 30% of customers who booked a number online completed their journey with a store visit to purchase a SIM
- 25% lower average subscriber acquisition cost than the Saudi benchmark
- 35X return on investment from Google Search

Virgin Mobile successfully launches its brand in Saudi Arabia by adopting a mobile and digital-first strategy, achieving lowest subscriber acquisition costs

As the first Mobile Virtual Network Operator (MVNO) to launch in Saudi Arabia, Virgin Mobile set out to offer a next generation mobile service with a fully re-defined customer experience created for and by Saudi youth. Saudi Arabia is one of the most connected societies in the world, and the country's young demographic is constantly on the search for new digital experiences. With innovation at its heart, Virgin Mobile adopted a digital-first strategy to bring the brand to life in a highly competitive market already saturated with large, well-established telcos.

The plan was for offline advertising to complement online activity, with digital making up the majority of the overall marketing mix. Offline mainly took the form of on-the-ground activations – with digital twists – to drive tactical awareness and traffic to the website. The online advertising components were designed to deliver on a well-structured and complete customer journey – from awareness to consideration and purchase – through a highly targeted digital audience strategy.

Putting digital front and centre

Traditionally when customers wanted to purchase a SIM card, they had to search through numbers on SIM packs in retail stores to find the best digits. Virgin wanted to redefine that process and give members the chance to select a mobile number chosen by consumers through an engaging digital experience.

The customer journey was designed around a number-booking website where consumers could search at their convenience and book a preferred number to be later activated and collected with ease from retail stores. Bookings were defined as leads, while in-store activations were counted as conversions. The number-booking site was designed using a mobile-first approach to deliver a superior user experience. To ensure fans had the right information on this new journey at their fingertips, Virgin Mobile also produced and shared easy-to-understand brand and how-to videos available on YouTube and their social media feeds.

Online lead generation in KSA: A cost-effective approach

The majority of customers started their journey with Virgin Mobile online. Around 90% of number reservations were initiated on the number-booking site (either through direct website visits or sourced through digital advertising), while the remainder of number bookings were initiated in-store.

“We knew that to reach a hyper-connected youth market segment, we had to build an innovative digital and mobile-first model and then amplify our efforts using digital campaigns and engagement,” says Vice President of Brand Rob Beswick. “By launching the digital approach pre-commercial launch we were able to not only increase the brand awareness in the market significantly at

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"We recognised that in order to deliver an innovative digital-first experience for our members we needed to partner directly with Google even before the commercial launch. Once we launched the online number-booking engine, we needed to be sure that we had real-time ability to follow the customer journey between search, display and YouTube. Google helped us deliver on our customer journey across all touchpoints from day one."

— Rob Beswick, Vice President Brand, Virgin Mobile

a relatively low cost, but also engage with our audience in a highly-targeted way. The results clearly show that an innovative use of digital can build brand awareness, move the masses and be highly influential in initiating the customer purchase journey. Our Saudi audience proved that they're willing to book online, which means they're willing to transact online, creating even more exciting possibilities for the future."

Digital advertising played a significant role in influencing direct website visits. One-third of direct booking customers interacted with a Virgin Mobile digital ad throughout their journey. Google formats contributed 71% of the number bookings generated from digital advertising, despite absorbing only 60% of the overall digital budget. Meanwhile, the cost per lead from Google search was significantly more cost effective than those generated by any other digital platform.

Online to store: Customers will make the journey for the right proposition

After a consumer had booked a number online, SMS and email marketing were used to assist them in finalising their purchase through a store visit. As a result, 30% of users who booked online (leads) visited a store for pickup (conversion).

Overall, the average subscriber acquisition cost of this digital-first strategy was at least 25% lower than the prepaid average subscriber acquisition cost benchmark in the Saudi market. Digital advertising produced a return on investment that exceeded a factor of 15, while Google search – thanks to the intent nature of the platform – produced an incredible return on investment that exceeded a factor of 35.

"Digital advertising in general and Google formats in specific allowed us to revolutionise the traditional telco marketing model whereby we detached online spend from the capped marketing budget and pegged it to revenue, hence creating an unlimited budget capped at a maximum cost per sale," says Fadi Khater, Managing Partner at Netizency, Virgin Mobile's digital agency. "This has been the most cost efficient telecom marketing activity I have witnessed, having worked on the launch of 25 telecom operators across the region."

"From a total ROI perspective, Google proved to be an outstanding partner for us," Rob affirms. "We worked closely with the Google teams on refining our market approach with their understanding of the telecommunications market and detailed analytics support. Our close cooperation in continuously fine tuning our audience strategy helped secure the lowest subscriber acquisition cost and led directly to the success of the project."