



Executive Interview: Christopher Krohn, President and CMO at Restaurant.com

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Christopher Krohn is President and Chief Marketing Officer at [Restaurant.com](#) and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Marketing at [The University of Chicago Booth School of Business](#). He specializes in leading e-commerce and multi-channel businesses through expansions and new business launches, periods of high growth, and turnaround situations. [Droid Report](#) recently interviewed Christopher Krohn about his current roles, discussing insights on leadership, mobility and business, and the upcoming plans for FY 2014 for Restaurant.com.



Christopher Krohn

President and CMO at Restaurant.com

Adjunct Assistant Professor of Marketing at The University of Chicago Booth School of Business

Droid Report: Restaurant.com has grown significantly since 2007, nearly tripling its workforce and expanding from 7,000 to more than 14,000 restaurant partners, offering nearly 50,000 unique daily deals offers. What are some upcoming plans that may be in your leadership department to driving profit and growth for 2014?

Christopher Krohn: Top three initiatives Restaurant.com is focused on right now are:

1. New product introductions & product bundles through Specials by Restaurant.com, a travel and entertainment product brand.
2. Enhancing our mobile platforms as customers shift their purchases more and more toward mobile devices.
3. Hiring more sales people in order to bring on more restaurant partners and more corporate B2B clients.

Droid Report: How do you stay customer focused at the company in today's business environment?

Christopher Krohn: A customer focused organization requires leadership from the top. Fortunately, our Chairman is very supportive of maintaining a customer focused culture.

In terms of orienting our business toward the customer, the company regularly conducts both formal and informal customer research and feedback studies. We then use the insights from these studies as well as data from customer behavior metrics to guide our product design and marketing.

Droid Report: You are viewed as being unique in your leadership role in unifying the marketing and IT teams. With a background as both developer and marketer, what advice would you give to being agile in marketing?

Christopher Krohn: Developers and marketers sometimes face opposite incentives in a business. Developers are incented to maintain a stable code base and thoroughly test incremental changes to the platform. Marketers are often rewarded for breakthrough results, innovation, and driving change. The secret to agile product management is to balance the need for a stable operating environment with the need to innovate in the marketplace. From a leadership perspective, the key is to ensure developers and marketers work together with common goals and a shared understanding of trade-offs. That requires careful thought around work processes and workplace communication to establish cross-functional coordination.

Droid Report: In addition to your corporate roles, you were also a former Instructor of Computer Science at Northwestern University and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Chicago Booth School of Business, where you regularly lecture MBA students. How have you seen the changing marketing landscape impact both businesses and university students? What business advice would you give to students?

Christopher Krohn: What I found over the years is students are increasingly savvy about the impact of technology on business. They are much more likely now than in the past to understand the integration points between the customer facing side of the business and its operational components. We are seeing the emergence of career tracks that combine marketing and technology backgrounds. Companies are increasingly devoting IT budgets toward marketing functions so my advice to students is to seek out some of these newer roles inside a company where they can leverage their “digital DNA” to make an impact.

Droid Report: As a veteran of e-commerce, hospitality and financial services industries and experience with growing entrepreneurial businesses and your expertise in

marketing, business development and technology, the world is evolving as smartphone and mobile adoption continues to grow. How do you see BYOD affecting leadership?

Christopher Krohn: My view is that companies who try to control their employees' choices of device or preferred access method will put themselves at a competitive disadvantage. Increasingly, business is about accessing, manipulating and acting on sources of data that is increasingly distributed. To leverage employee creativity and analytic skills, leadership must enable employees the opportunity to access that data in the way that best fits their job function and personal strengths. Any other leadership will most likely to mask their employees' productivity. Put another way, if you mandate that all employees use Blackberry's, you are probably not getting optimal results.

Droid Report: Christopher, what does leadership look like today for you as a CMO?

Christopher Krohn: The most important thing about being an effective CMO is ensuring you have the right people in the right roles. Recruiting and employee retention become critical to that success. Next, you have to have the right management processes in place to ensure those team members are working together toward common goals. That means you have to have clear business objectives identified and communicate those objectives. Also, you have to maintain a balance between efficiency and giving employees the room to innovate. Finally, it's critical to keep the entire executive team bought into the plan and create a customer-focused culture throughout the organization.

Droid Report: What would you consider as your personal approach to leadership?

Christopher Krohn: The most important aspect of leadership is hiring outstanding individuals and letting them do their jobs. The people that work for you should ideally be smarter than you and more knowledgeable in their area of expertise. Then the leaders' role becomes about providing the team with resources and support they need to reach their full potential.

The leaders' focus should be around – defining a vision, setting objectives, and making sure the organization's processes and culture support the mission.

Droid Report: How do you think our new technologies like Android OS and smartphones have changed for leaders?

Christopher Krohn: It used to be that leaders of an organizational silo could gain and keep power by hoarding information and limiting access to that information. With the ubiquity of communications devices and the visualization tools built into them, access to data has become increasingly democratized. Leaders today therefore are effective to the degree that they can facilitate the analysis and communication of critical operational data across the organization and leverage that to build buy-in for entrepreneurial change.

Droid Report: What are some important qualities of yourself that have been critical to your success?

Christopher Krohn: A lot of my successes derive from things I've learned over time and especially learning from past mistakes. I think that the willingness to look clearly at your failures paired with a drive for self-improvement is critical for success regardless of your profession.

Second, business success usually comes from balancing an optimistic entrepreneurial vision with a pragmatic sense of what can be achieved operationally today.

Third, it's critical to focus analytically on the data and the objective reality in front of you, but balance that analytic approach with the knowledge that organizations succeed through people, and that people have emotional needs that need to be met.

So, my view of personal success is about continually calibrating the mix of confidence and humility, pragmatism and optimism, and analytics and empathy.

Droid Report: Is there anything else you feel Android users and the Android market should know?

Christopher Krohn: I really like the spirit that drives a lot of innovation in the Android platform. Often that spirit exemplifies the triumph of substance over form. So, my advice to developers working in the platform is to have a crystal clear idea of what you want to achieve. Stay authentic to that vision and always put the user first. In the long run, useful beats trendy.

We would like to thank Christopher Krohn for taking the time for this discussion and Restaurant.com.

Christopher Krohn, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Marketing, is the President and Chief Marketing Officer at Restaurant.com. He specializes in leading e-commerce and multi-channel businesses through expansions and new business launches, periods of high growth, and turnaround situations. Areas of expertise include general management, e-commerce, internet and direct marketing, IT management, business development, operations, advertising and promotions, PR and social media, sales management, and finance. Prior to his work with Restaurant.com, he was Chief Marketing Officer and VP Business Development of Whitney Automotive Group, Vice President of Marketing for Harrah's Entertainment, and has served as a Director / Advisory Board member for several startups and non-profits. Krohn has also held a variety of consulting positions with leading firms such as Bain & Company and Accenture. An alum, Krohn earned his MBA from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business in 1997. Additionally, he holds a BA from Northwestern University.



Restaurant.com

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