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Social Media Marketing: Mobile Applications for Business

Intro to Mobile Apps

Today, mobile matters more than ever for business. In 2010, there were about 5.4 billion mobile users. By 2014, the number of mobile users has grown significantly reaching 6.5 billion users. More to the point, 91 percent of people on the planet carry a cellular phone. Why mobile? One reason is over half of current mobile users use their mobile device as their primary means to access the Internet. For business, mobile matters because an average of 80% of time spent on cellular phones is spent using applications (app).

Google defines an app as a self-contained program or piece of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose and can be directly downloaded by users onto mobile devices. As a business, mobile apps have the potential to generate market visibility for business brands and connect customers to those brands in new ways. A basic app can be easily created which provides a business with its own digital business card.

Business owners should consider the following mobile trends when deciding about using a mobile app in business:

- 56% of people own a smart phone
- 50% of mobile phone users, use mobile as their primary Internet source
- 80% of time on mobile is spent inside apps
- 72% of tablet owners purchase online from their tablets each week
- The top 3 activities used while in-store shopping are: comparison shopping, searching for coupons, and searching for product reviews
- The top 3 app stores are: Apple (50 billion downloads), Google Play (48 billion); and Blackberry (3 billion)

Things to Know

To App or Not?
- Business owners must weigh the benefits and costs of using a business app
- According to Mashable, there are 5 ways to decide if a business needs an app or not. Business owners should consider:
  - o Does the company have the expertise to develop an app and can it be easily updated
  - o If possible, know which devices your customers will use to access your app
  - o In place of an app, websites can be "response-designed" to create customer views for mobile, tablets or desktop computers. In this case, an app would not be necessary
  - o Consider the audience who will use your app and your budget; if the budget is small, then choosing one platform for an app makes dollar sense
  - o The connectivity with customers matters. When using push notifications, GPS or contacts, most likely the business needs a mobile app for its product or service

Quick Tip

Things to consider when developing a mobile app:

1. Determine who your audience is and what they need
2. Determine what will make your app different from others of its kind
3. Network with tech gurus to help you
4. Know what devices your audience uses
5. Determine if you app makes your audience's life easier or saves them money...if not rethink your app.

http://www.dallasnews.com/business/small-business/20140122-the-five-tips-to-consider-when-developing-an-app-for-your-business.ece

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Things to Know *(Continued)*

It's No Longer Difficult to Develop Apps

- Business owners can develop their own apps using third-party web-based software services

- For example, www.seattleclouds.com is one of many services that can be used; Conduit Mobile is another http://mobile.conduit.com/ along with Genxm: http://mobile-app-development.genxm.com/create-mobile-applications.

Keep It Simple, Keep It Practical

- An app must be easy to use

- An app should contain good graphics

- Keep in mind, 57% of users will not recommend a company with an app that is difficult to use

Got App Revenue?

- Register your app with advertisement networks in order to allow other companies to have advertisements in the form of banners and get paid for allowing them to do so

- Allow a free "lite" version of the app to attract initial downloads on all platforms, as well as a full version with more capabilities for customers to purchase

- Get a sponsorship by offering your successful app to a larger company. Your app may be good for all business owners, but one business owner may have more of an incentive to use your app, or even buy it from you for a profit

Resources

- http://www.digitalbuzzblog.com/infographic-2013-mobile-growth-statistics/

- http://www.digitalbuzzblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Infographic-2013-Mobile-Growth-Statistics-Large.jpg

- http://mobithinking.com/mobile-marketing-tools/latest-mobile-stats/a#subscribers

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_app

- http://www.forbes.com/sites/reuvencohen/2013/03/22/build-your-own-web-or-mobile-app-in-minutes-with-these-cloud-based-tools/

- http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/223177

- http://www.bluecloudsolutions.com/blog/5-ways-free-apps-money/

- http://www.intomobile.com/2013/05/31/mobile-apps-have-changed-world-infographic/

- http://www.insidemobileapps.com/2013/11/08/mobile-statistics-for-the-modern-day-business/

- http://mashable.com/2014/01/20/business-mobile-app/?utm_cid=mash-com-fb-jobs-link

About the Author

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Dr. James Barnes joined the Department of Agricultural Economics at Mississippi State University after serving for seven years as an Extension economist with the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center and Director of the Louisiana Center for Rural Initiatives. Dr. Barnes' Extension and research work focuses on the economics and management of social media in business, broadband technology adoption in rural places, rural health care, and regional economic development. Since joining MSU, Dr. Barnes has launched the **Mississippi Bricks to Clicks Entrepreneurship Extension Program** aimed at helping business owners understand how to leverage a Facebook network for business profits.

Mobile App Development Platforms Compared:

Using an app for a business can be a great tool to connect with customers and inform them of new promotions which in turn can build customer loyalty. But business owners should consider the benefits (connectivity with customers) versus the costs of development and maintenance of an app. Many different dimensions about app creation and maintenance should be considered when business owners choose which company they decide to use. It's not just about price. It's also about the ease

Platform	Description	Key Features	Connecting with Customers	Unique Features	Pricing
Appery.io	Appery is a cloud-based mobile app builder that you can use to create apps for Android, iOS and a Windows Phone.	Includes Apache Cordova (Phone Gap) with access to its built-in components. Easy to get started quickly. It includes a visual editor using drag and drop components.	You can add powerful functionality with the Appery plugin catalog, or create your own custom private plugins to use in your apps. Collaboration is simple, allowing you to share your mobile project with development teams, business users and customers in real time.	Cloud-based; no downloads necessary.	Free up to $180 per month
Mobile Roadie	**Mobile Roadie is an app creator that allows anyone to create and manage their own iOS or Android app.**	**Supports all media types, automatic importing of RSS, Twitter or Google News keywords.**	**Use the free Mobile Roadie Connect app to preview your app accurately, just as users would on their devices. The app guides you through the submission process, with Mobile Roadie checking the quality and appropriateness of your content.**	**Easily craft a custom look and feel for your app and apply that to all platforms, and use the suite of marketing tools once your app is launched.**	**$125 per month (Core) up to $667 per month (Pro).**
TheApp Builder	TheAppBuilder provides a suite of apps to suit employees, clients, events and brochures.	Updating the structure and content of your app is easy, even after launch. Unlimited updates and publish on multiple mobile platforms in one click. The platform supports native iPhone, iPad and Android, with updates going live within 60 seconds of submitting a change.	You can protect both public and private apps with usernames and passwords, and distribute them via the app store.	Using the dedicated AppLibrary, you can provide users with a window into multiple apps and even customize it with your own branding.	Available upon request
Appy Pie	**Appy Pie is a cloud-based DIY mobile app creation tool that allows users without programming skills to create an app for Windows, Android and iOS, and publish it to Google Play or iTunes.**	**Drag and drop pages help you create your own mobile app online. Receive an HTML5-based hybrid app that works with all platforms, including Blackberry. All revisions are in real time, with the ability to send push notifications, monetize with ads, see live analytics, and track location with GPS.**	**The appointment scheduler is especially useful for businesses such as Doctors, Salons or Spas with contact features such as one touch call, QR codes included.**	**Using the code page you can embed custom code and embed iframes.**	**Free to $33 per month for upgraded accounts**

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Mobile App Development Platforms Compared:

Platform	Description	Key Features	Connecting with Customers	Unique Features	Pricing
App Machine	AppMachine is an easy-to-use platform to build and design professional native apps for both iOS and Android.	Design the app in your own unique style and choose your navigation paths, colors, fonts and icons, taking complete control of layout and watching your progress using the Previewer.	Using the drag-and-drop interface, you can combine different building blocks that offer a variety of features, such as information, photos and video. The building blocks also let you link your app to Facebook,	Easy to connect to social media platforms and an easy to drag-and-drop interface.	One-time fee only, and start at $499 and go up to $899.
Game Salad	**GameSalad allows you to create and publish games for a variety of platforms, including iOS, Android, HTML5 and OS X.**	**Easy drag-and-drop interface allows you to get started quickly. The game creator features a scene and actor editor, where you spend most of your game creation time, setting up actors in a scene and creating attributes, images, sounds and navigating between actors.**	**GameSalad recently teamed up with Amazon to offer access to development options specifically optimized for the Kindle Fire platform, including drag-and-drop integration with in-app purchase and GameCircle APIs.**	**The active community forum is a huge plus, with access to help and advice from fellow independent game designers.**	**Free to $299 per year for Pro**
Bizness Apps	BiznessApps provides a platform to help create mobile apps for businesses a very simple process.	The easy-to-use content management system allows you to create an app in minutes, and customize everything using pre-built designs or your own.	It provides a wealth of features, including food ordering, shopping cart, loyalty programs, dynamic content, third party integrations, push notifications, comprehensive analytics and more.	Weekly webinars on how to build beautiful mobile apps using the BiznessApps platform are available.	$29 per month for mobile websites and up to $59 for mobile apps
AppMakr	**AppMakr is a DIY app creation platform that lets anyone craft iOS, Android and HTML5 apps, with no coding knowledge required.**	**Make as many apps as you want, with unlimited updates, and utilize a number of features, including push notifications, high resolution photo galleries, live updates, music and video streaming, chat rooms, Google Maps integration, shared events calendars, in-app shopping, and much more.**	**Keep track of all your apps through the Dashboard, easily customize your app's looks and functionality, add content with tabs, preview your app in real time and publish it to the markets with a single click.**	**Founded in 2009, and recently acquired by Infinite Monkeys, to now form one of the largest DIY app publishing platforms worldwide.**	**Free up to a $99 one-time fee for self-publish**
ShoutEm	ShoutEm offers an app builder with complete content management, powerful user engagement tools and monetization options, coupled with a seamless publishing process.	Publish apps under your developer account to both iTunes and Google Play, and update apps or content in real-time.	The interface builder offers many integrated functions with existing content sources such as WordPress, Foursquare, Facebook, Twitter, SoundCloud and more. Offers monitization to create a revenue stream for apps.	ShoutEm also offers regular auto-updates, to ensure your app is always ahead of new iOS and Android updates.	$19.90 per month and up to $119.90 per month for unlimited

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Source: Mashable.com (http://mashable.com/2013/12/03/build-mobile-apps/)

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