

COLUMNS

## Apps are key to a meaningful user-centric mobile strategy

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By **Peter Eckert**

Mobile applications are increasingly becoming a strategic imperative for enterprise and consumer channels. Last year, the industry saw a significant uptick in companies shifting their attention to mobile app development for the exploding mobile device market that also includes the wearable device space.

The demand for mobile solutions is only expected to grow. In fact, Gartner predicts "that mobile application development projects targeting smartphones and tablets will outnumber native PC projects by a ratio of 4:1 by 2015."

This reality has caused a near panic for companies struggling to keep pace with the evolving speed of technology. The influence of the app-centric world started only a short time ago, with the release of the iPhone, yet many marketers are already behind the curve.

With the proliferation of mobile technologies, the landscape is only becoming more complex. Most companies lack a clear mobile strategy, which addresses the present and future evolution of the mobile ecosystem, because they do not fully understand their audiences and the execution skill set needed.

Apps not created equal

The cliché, "There's an app for that," is all too true, yet not all apps are created equal.

Right now, marketers are trying to figure out how to create and implement the right mobile strategy.

Keeping pace with competitive pressures, companies are spending billions of dollars every year developing and deploying mobile apps that do not meet user needs and aspirations or make an emotional connection, wasting at least 30 percent of the overall spend.

Clearly, mobile devices have changed consumer behavior and expectations.

In a world of 24-hour access to information, shopping and social media, there has been a significant shift in the way that consumers use mobile devices.

Apps have evolved to create a powerful brand and user experience. Good apps enable users to do things rapidly, more efficiently, and fulfill a need that in return creates an emotional bond and affinity toward a brand.

Users quickly become extremely frustrated with poor apps, leading to a loss in sales and an erosion of brand value.

Some common pitfalls to modern-day app deployment include lacking clarity in user needs, not fully understanding the mobile medium, lacking internal development skills and an inability to acquire the tools needed to accomplish the task.

Additionally, many marketers are ignoring the growing global audiences. Mobile access and usage are growing at a fast clip in foreign countries.

Gartner forecasts "by 2017, mobile apps will be downloaded more than 268 billion times, generating revenue of more than \$77 billion and making apps one of the most popular computing tools for users across the globe."

Do not embrace the herd

Staying ahead of the competition and creating engaging user experiences requires a thorough examination of what marketers want to accomplish, whom they are trying to reach and what end users need.

A key strategy for success entails crafting and executing a well-thought-out mobile strategy that includes making a decision to go the native apps route or the Web app route.

The demand is global, and the shift is taking shape in different forms and in different places. Marketers will need to invest wisely with a clear strategic plan.

According to Forrester Research, "In 2015, marketing leaders who have embraced the mobile mind shift will accelerate spending to create an insurmountable gap between themselves the industry leaders and the laggards who view mobile as just another channel."

With so much at stake, companies should not just rush to push out an app and see if it sticks. They should step back and create a solid strategy that will propel the goals of the organization, and address actual user needs, aspirations and emotional connections.

If a mobile solution does not address real user needs, it will not create a lasting impression and the abandonment rate will be high.

Engagement is key.

Providing the right information at the right time in a simple and intuitive way will drive adoption, increase efficiencies, loyalty and brand awareness.

Trends to watch include location-based services, wearable technology and the Internet of Things. Marketers must think about the big picture.

Necessity of a mobile strategy

Getting it right the first time is crucial. There is a very clear step that marketers can take to better define their mobile strategy. It begins with understanding the user.

To understand users is to be able to step into their perspective and interpret what matters to them to empathize with their challenges, achievements, motivations and desires. This kind of understanding does not come from numbers alone or from counting clicks.

Borrowing from the fields of anthropology and psychology, trained researchers must spend time with users, watching what they do, talking to them, and witnessing their frustrations and their victories firsthand.

From there, these teams will take what they have learned about people and make decisions through the lens of the business goals, selecting opportunities that are most effective.

With design and development teams working alongside the researchers, marketers can ensure that they are building software that meets true user needs.

MARKETERS CANNOT just sit back and wait. Those without an effective mobile strategy are already behind the curve.

There is a pressing need to focus intellectual and financial capital into deploying short and long-term strategies to meet the ever-evolving user demand and changing global mobile appl environment.

Merely deploying apps without the upfront legwork will fail.

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