

COLUMNS

Best practice for mobile apps

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It was recently announced by Nielsen that 37 percent of U.S. mobile consumers own smartphones. Of those consumers, 36 percent own Android devices, followed by 26 percent on iPhone and 23 percent on BlackBerry.

Due to the iPhone's maturity in the applications market, iPhone users have many more apps to choose from than the other devices.

Rap on app

Mobile apps are becoming so commonplace that brands are being evaluated by consumers based on whether they have an app and how good or bad it is.

EffectiveUI and Harris Interactive performed a study last fall and found that 69 percent of people surveyed indicated that a bad experience with a brand's mobile application results in negative perception about the brand.

Also, 73 percent of mobile users surveyed said that they expected a brand's mobile app to be easier to use than their Web site.

When the Internet began, Web sites were basic.

The technology that was available at the time was part of the reason, but when you look at sites you thought were good 10 years ago, and then consider the same site now, it is likely you would find it lacking.

It seems that Web site expectations did not really start to reach sophisticated levels until fairly recently.

Our learning curve for the Web overall may have been a factor, with diverse populations still just getting onto the Web.

As technology improves, we can make the user experience overall more satisfying, and users do not realize what has been put in place to make it so easy for them to navigate.

Mobile apps are different.

People who use smartphones today are technically far more advanced than average users were in the early days of the Web.

Even though the app market is still rapidly growing, today's users are savvy.

Brands may be novices to the app market, but their audience is advanced and will not be satisfied with a lackluster or poorly functioning application.

High five

Some basic best practices to remember:

Keep it simple: Apps can do more than one thing, but they need to do them very well. The more complexity you add, the harder it will be to do it well.

Do not try and solve all of the user's needs just give them what they need.

For example, do not add location based features such as Google Maps unless there is a component of the application that requires it.

Use OPA (Other People's Apps): Many partnerships are available to get feeds or APIs from other mobile app vendors or companies.

If you know of a great feature, find out if the developer has made it available to other people before you reinvent it.

For example, Yelp is available as an add-on API for a fee, but well worth the investment.

Consider communities: Adding in social elements potentially gives your app more engagement and reasons to return.

Tagging, writing reviews or leaving feedback can give your app more content and provide more interest to consumers.

Plan on your platforms: Android is becoming a force to reckon with do not just go with iPhone and call it a day.

Also, by all means, adapt your iPhone app for the iPad, but consider how much more you can do with it. And stand by for all of the other new tablets coming.

The Love Factor: You cannot be successful without getting good app rankings people download apps that have good rankings. Think of fun ways to get your consumers to provide their feedback.

Your app can only be successful if people like it, which in turns means they can find it.

Highly-ranked apps are promoted in the app stores without you having to pay to advertise them.

MYLOVE OF apps began years ago with little widgets and fun RSS feeds. We have come so far, and we have so much further to go.

Do not be afraid to jump in, but keep in mind that you will need to invest time and effort to create a useful mobile app that will provide value to your customers and keep your customer's perception of your brand in a positive light.

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