AMERICAN MARKETER

Business at its best

Cutting through the noise in today's saturated app market

April 12, 2013

By Ian Schenkel

With more than 1.5 million apps in the Apple and Android app stores, the mobile application market has become an overwhelming space for those who want to develop and market new apps.

Since the early days of the launch of the iPhone in 2007, the industry has changed dramatically there are hundreds of thousands of app solutions available. Equally, there has been a proliferation in the number of devices that support apps, and consumer preference for managing their online activities via apps over Web sites has increased significantly.

Looking at this today, what has changed? Where is the industry headed? Where are the opportunities for apps to stand out?

Multiple layer apps for increased user retention

Despite the available technology to create more complex and in-depth apps, there has been an increasing trend towards unsophisticated, single-function apps.

Part of this is due to consumer demand there is an over-proliferation of apps in the marketplace and they are no longer only geared towards a tech-savvy, specialist audience, but towards the general populace. Because of this access, the market is crowded and people cannot be bothered to conduct in-depth searches for apps.

In our experience, to build for long-term success, app developers need to focus on more than just single-function applications.

A study by Nielsen found that the average number of applications per smartphone was rising, but that the amount of time people spent using apps had not changed much.

Put simply, people are downloading an increasing number of apps. However, there is a trend towards a "try once and throw away" mindset in which not many of them are being used long term. They simply become a part of the user's everyday armory.

In this context, single-function apps have a greater risk of becoming redundant or being easily trumped by well-made, more comprehensive apps.

Another challenge facing the single-function, one-trick-pony app is that they are unlikely to achieve long-term success due to the sheer volume of choice available.

The rise in numbers of apps available means that a single function app is going to have to compete with dozens of

The rise in numbers of apps available means that a single function app is going to have to compete with dozens of other apps on the market that can do exactly the same thing, sometimes better.

With only one card to play, the risk of being trumped is ever-present and today's fickle consumers will not think twice before dumping apps with limited functionality, to make space on their devices for something better.

App developers and marketers need to create apps with multiple layers of functionality to perform many tasks. With the increasing capabilities of mobile devices, users will in turn expect their apps to be able to do more for them to keep up.

Personalized and evolving apps

When apps were first introduced, the technology powering them was considered archaic in comparison to what we could do with desktops.

Today, app functionalities are comparable to desktop, and this upcoming year we will see even more increased capabilities. The proliferation of touch and other sensory technology will allow apps to enable functions that were not available before.

As new mobile technologies such as speech recognition and geospatial tracking become more prevalent, personalized technology will be more popular than ever.

For example, apps taking advantage of these increased capabilities will have increased precision and relevance, enabling the use of many more information sources, as well as including the ability to link to other devices or apps, allowing an ever more adaptive user experience.

Apps will need to evolve and to take advantage of these technologies to create a constantly improving user experience.

Developers, unable to keep up with new features, risk being eclipsed by fast-moving peers who are better able to integrate the latest trends.

Staying relevant

The app market has certainly evolved far from what it once was.

Approaching the app market today with a new offering is the same as approaching any established market in the software industry you must have multiple functional layers, constantly update your product to integrate the latest technology and maintain competitive edge in order to stand out from the ever-increasing crowd.

You can ride the success of your apps for a limited time, but you have to keep thinking one step ahead. Only innovation can stave off the revenue plateau in a market that moves and adapts this quickly.

Ian Schenkel is CEO of EuroSmartz, Binstead, Isle of Wight, Britain. Reach him at i.schenkel@eurosmartz.com.