It's More Than An Event,
It's a Memorable Experience

Event Apps
In Focus

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Mobile Meetings In Focus

What makes a successful meeting? That depends on who's asking. To the stakeholders, it's all about the numbers: money, revenue, and ROI. To the meeting planner, it's the details: venues, contracts, and registrations. But to the attendee, it's much more than an event, it's a memorable experience. This fact may never change. What has changed is how we create those experiences, and the role evolving technology continues to play.

Today, it's hard to think about technology without thinking about mobile. Mobile devices allow us to make sense of the world around us. They facilitate our experiences and become extensions of our digital selves. But the device itself plays only a small part in the grand scheme. The future of meetings will is more mobile-based, therefore, it should become a central part of your strategy. This white paper is aimed to undercover how mobile event apps can lead to more memorable attendee experiences, providing features, benefits, and practical tools to help shape future programs successfully.

Why do we need an app?

Audiences are becoming increasingly reliant on their mobile devices. Therefore, they need to be met with a mobile-friendly experience. Because of mobile, event professionals now have even more ways to maximize their effectiveness across multiple devices and multiple channels. And with mobile event apps, the opportunity to create rich, positive mobile experiences that foster engagement year round continues to grow.

By 2017 there will be more than 200 billion app downloads per year. [1] With its growing popularity, a mobile app is a challenge that every event professional faces; however, this is also a huge opportunity. The app is a significant tool in driving sustainability, as well as other objectives, but most importantly, it will help define your success.

How do apps turn a profit?

Today's mobile users are less willing to pay for apps up front, therefore, organizations are finding alternative ways to generate revenue via advertising and sponsorships.

Advertising

Mobile ads can be a great way to drive brand/event awareness. According to a 2013 Google Study, [2] mobile ads are definitely being noticed by smartphone users, especially if they are discovered within an app.
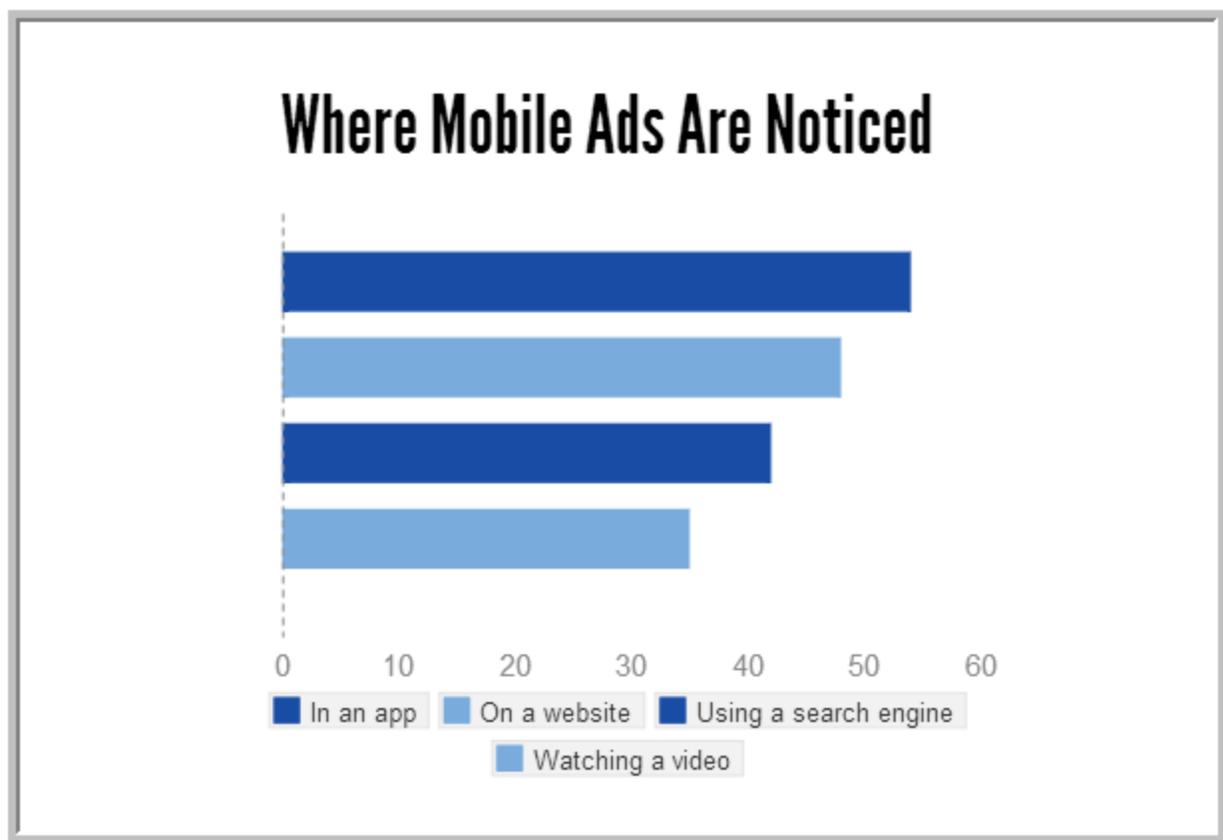
Source: Our Mobile Planet: Google 2013 [Study]. [2]

Sponsorships

Your app can drive additional revenue by being a promotional hub for exhibitors, sponsors, and even hotels. In a recent article, MeetingsNet [3] suggests looking for apps with strong sponsorship opportunities, such as:

- Prominent placement on the homepage of the app
- Sponsor logos and images
- Messaging opportunities
- Clickable banner advertising on key agenda sessions
- Ability to display by level
- Linking of sponsor brochures or presentations inside the app
- Gaming opportunities that drive attendees to sponsors and exhibitor booths
- One on one meetings capability
- Direct sponsor and attendee interaction

Native Explained

Eighty-five percent of mobile users prefer mobile apps over the mobile web. [4] Deciding what type of app is right for your business, native vs. web-based, will be extremely vital. When thinking about mobile for your events, the two most important factors are speed and convenience. Essentially, it should be made easy for mobile audiences to interact with your brand before, during, and after events.

"A native app as one that is specifically designed to run on a device's operating system and machine firmware, and typically needs to be adapted for different devices. A Web app, or browser application, is one in which all or some parts of the software are downloaded from the Web each time it is run. It can usually be accessed from all Web-capable mobile devices."
- Global Intelligence Alliance [5]

This is especially important to event managers who cannot always depend on a venue's ability to offer reliable internet access, or lack thereof. As discussed in a relevant blog post, Bandwidth For Meetings, venues have been notorious for poor bandwidth configuration, leading to inefficiencies on-site. This is an unfortunate downside to a web-based app, since they require internet access. A true mobile app is the same as a native app, in which it must be downloaded through the app stores. They allow for more customization and control of content, including push notifications and real-time updates. Whereas, web-based is more of a one size fits all solution.

Native Apps Maintain Larger Mindshare
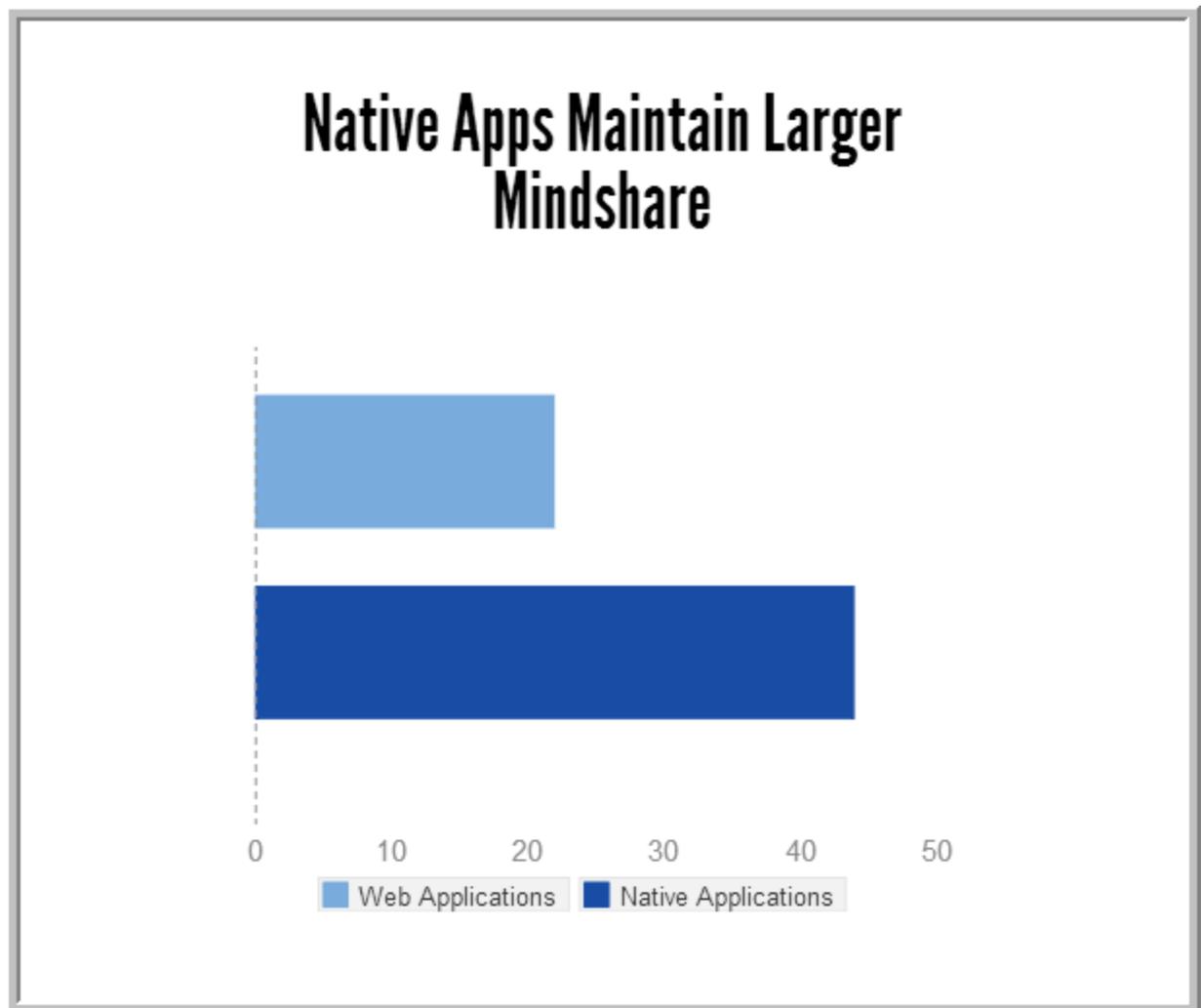
Furthermore, these types of apps can be accessed when there is no connectivity (i.e., in planes, subways, and dead zones). Web-based apps are not quite the same, but very similar to a mobile website, or a simplified version of your corporate or event website. Based on this evidence, the most realistic type of app for events would be a native app.

Attendee Favorites

The average person spends one-hundred and twenty-seven minutes per day in mobile apps. [6] The most obvious goal behind building a mobile app is to drive adoption. However, there are many apps that don't make it past the initial download before they are deleted and never seen again.

Given this, the app should be designed with the user in mind. In a blog post, [7 Event App Features You Should Not Be Without](#), we listed some mobile event app functionalities that attendees covet the most:

1. Attendee Lists – Improve the attendee experience and help attendees network before and during the event. Larger corporations may not even know if other colleagues from their organization are attending, but they can find this out quickly with shared attendee lists.

2. Agenda/Breakout Session Organizer – Dramatically reduce those high printing costs. With quality printing ink costing as much as caviar, converting your event's collateral, advertising, and attendee guides into a mobile format is a no-brainer. On average, how much do you spend on printing per event? Now imagine that total being dramatically reduced by half or more! Also, your attendees will love you for not making them carry around those heavy event programs.

3. Floorplan/Event Map – For those not familiar with the area, an interactive map will be handy for locating hotels, dining, points of interest, transportation and entertainment. Carbon footprints can be dramatically reduced by including specific maps, walking routes, and mass transit options for attendees visiting from out of town.

4. Automated Notifications – Automated reminders can be sent out to your attendees, along with any changes to your event, sessions, presenters, and so forth will be instantly updated on the app in real-time. Also incorporating a FAQ section can be a customer service lifesaver. Save your attendees from having to locate staff onsite to answer their questions.

5. Media Gallery (Photo/Video/Slides) – With a real-time event photo/video stream, all attendees can contribute directly to one shared photo/video collection.

6. Social Integration – Integrating social feeds into your app will allow for up-to-the-minute promotions, announcements and notifications. Your attendees can also quickly share their event experiences, commentary and photos.

7. Digital Notepad – Allows attendees to take notes during sessions so they can remember important discussion points.

With the right attendee features in place, a simple event experience can be transformed into an epic journey and all in one single app.

Planner Must-Haves

While beneficial to the attendee, there are additional app must-haves that are also highly valuable to the planner, as well as other key stakeholders. For instance:

1. Event Management System Integration – With event management integration you no longer have to duplicate your efforts. You can choose what information needs to be pulled from your [Event Management System](#) into your mobile app.

2. Surveying/Polling – In-app surveys and polling systems can reveal interesting information about the audience's background, their knowledge level, opinions on the topics of your session, and a wide range of other data. This real-time Q&A provides immediate feedback on topics relevant to the conference to the facilitator and the participants alike. Whether you have an audience of five or five hundred, it's one of the easiest ways to interact with a larger audience, say at a conference, and even virtual audiences. Also, consider incorporating gamification methods within the app to increase levels of interactivity, engagement, and participation.

3. Analytics Integration – The best way to grow your mobile audience is to know who uses your app, how they're using it, on what devices, and where they come from. These analytics will assist you in further improving your events and app building for future events as well as lead to increased app monetization and conversions. Mobile App Analytics makes it all clear, with features like:

   - Traffic Sources
   - Custom Reports
   - Event Tracking

- Real-Time Reporting
- Goals/Benchmarks

The two primary mobile app analytics providers are Flurry [7] and Google Mobile App Analytics. [8] Using either service, you will be able to view your app downloads, usage statistics, etc., to understand how users interact with your app.

4. Flexible Content Management – A flexible content management system makes it easier to brand your event planning apps with the same look and feel as your company website and event registration site. Carrying that consistency across all platforms further enhances your professionalism and brand. Flexible platforms also allow administrators to make changes to app content in real-time.

Combining the right set of features, you can shape a positive and memorable attendee experience, helping attendees maximize their time and helping you maximize your results.

The Build

Whether we build your event app or you decide to manage the creation process, do not be intimidated. With the growing app development environment, anyone can build their own apps. The two most important components of creating a successful app are planning and timing. Developing an app is much like planning an event. You have to expect that there are things that can go wrong, especially if this is your first app. Therefore, if you decide to incorporate an app into your event, it is recommended that you begin planning for both at the same time. The app development process can be broken down into four key stages, including:

1. Planning
2. Creation/Building
3. Testing
4. Submission

App Development Process

Planning
20%

Creation
20%

Testing
10%

Submission
50%
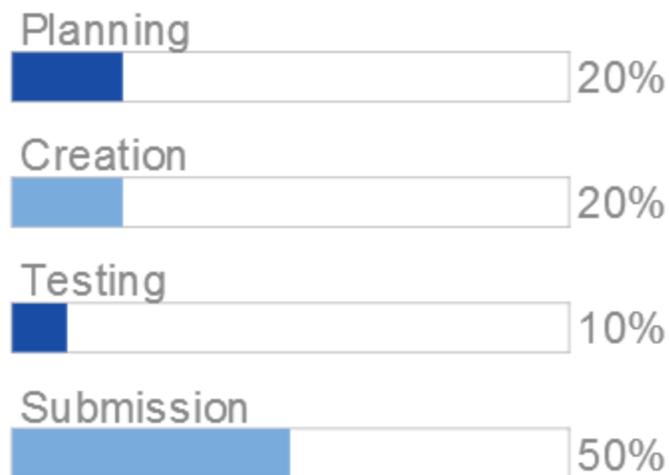
Step 1: Determine Your Objective(s) & Audience

- Will this app help you reach your target audience?
- Will this app drive revenue?
- Will this app provide value to attendees?
- Will this app provide value to your organization?
- Will this app save time?

Step 2: Determine What Resources You Will Need

- Graphics
- Marketing
- Guest Speakers (for profiles)
- Sponsors (for artwork and descriptions)
- Exhibitors (for descriptions)

Step 3: Create A Timeline

On average, it will take up to six to eight weeks to develop an app from start to finish. Once you've established a timeline, make sure to communicate it with your team and your organization.

1. Planning (2 weeks)
2. Creation/Building (2 weeks)
3. Testing (1-2 weeks)
4. Submission (1-4 weeks)

Step 4: Map Out Your Design

Work with Marketing/Design team to establish company style guides for accurate branding.

- App Icon
- Loading Image
- Main navigation tabs
- App Content

> *"**Don't duplicate your Web site.** Think about how your people behave in the mobile world. Pre-event, the typical user goes to your event Web site to see the location, agenda, and dates. On site, however, they want to know where their sessions are and how to get to the lobby from the ballroom. Your app should take advantage of the phone's capabilities, including the GPS, camera, and QR-code reader, to create a customized experience."*
>
> *- Alison Hall, MeetingsNet* [9]

Step 5: Integrate Analytics

You'll want to enter your Flurry or Google Mobile App Analytics key as one of your first steps to ensure analytics are integrated into your app.

Step 6: Set Up Surveys/Polling

During audience polls, the facilitator will post questions to participants, they respond immediately via a mobile device, the web poll instantly tallies the responses, and then the facilitator can display the results in real time. In-app surveys can work in the same way providing instant results, but they are intended for post-session/post-event evaluations. Both should be planned and created prior to the event.

Step 7: Testing

Make sure to thoroughly test the app before submitting to the app stores. New app submissions can and will be rejected immediately if functionality is even a question. The best way to test the functionality of your app is to try running on the actual device for which it is intended. Other categories of app testing include, but are not limited to: usability, performance, and upgrades. Once the app has been completely debugged, you're ready to move on to the next step.

Step 8: Submission To The App Stores

Early on in your event planning process, you should be thinking of submission to the app stores. There are many stores in the marketplace, but going for the most popular, such as Android and iOS, would be the most sensible. Ultimately, you will want your app to be cross functional, so consider submitting your app to as many stores as possible. Each app store has its own submission guidelines and turnaround times, so make sure to read the fine print before submitting your app. Reading and understanding the terms and conditions specified by each store will definitely improve your chances of getting approved.

App Promotion

For your event app to be successful you need to promote it, otherwise, people may never know it exists. In other event marketing efforts, create a "call to action" to download and use your app. In a blog post, [Promoting Your Event App](#), we listed some best practices to ensure your mobile event app receives the attention it deserves:

- **Event Website**

- - Include a banner highlighting the app and encourage visitors to download the app.
  - **Social Media**
    - Be sure to create your event's hashtag(s)
  - **Email Communications**
    - Always include the Android & Apple download links
  - **Signage**
    - Have strategically places app promotion boards
    - Create a QR Code for app download, or shortened links to the apps
  - **Video Promo**
    - Create a short snip-it video
    - Make the app your call-to-action and include the download link at the end of the video
  - **Staff**
    - Train staff on everything about your app & how to spread the word – before & during your event
  - **Get Sponsors Involved**
    - Ask sponsors to help drive traffic to your app
    - Drives more traffic to their business as well

There are many hurdles to jump when it comes to developing a successful mobile event app. Develop your app in-house if you can. You want to be as actively involved as you can in every stage of the development process. Be sure to test it thoroughly before submitting it to the marketplace. Take time out for app marketing and promotion using app review sites and find those willing to give you feedback on social media. Last, but most certainly not least, in the creation of your app, keep the focus on the end-user (the attendee), because they are the reason you're developing the mobile event app in the first place.

Conclusion

Today's mobile audiences have grown to expect more out of their online/offline experiences, requiring information that is timely, relevant, and easily accessible. Having an event app, you are to bridge this gap, creating events that are more memorable and more seamless. Countless

organizations are leveraging mobile event apps to increase their digital footprint as well as to improve event experiences. Now is the time to consider this for your organization!

Resources

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