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What marketers need to know before building a branded app

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By [Clint H. Parr](#)

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I had a nightmare. I pulled into work and realized I left my mobile phone at home. I panicked as I contemplated what to do. If I go back home, I will be late for work. If I try to do without it, how could I be reached in an emergency? How will I check my email between customer visits? I felt isolated from the world. Waking up, I realized it was just a dream.

Some of you are thinking, “It’s just a phone.” But I expect the majority of you understand that a mobile device, whether an iPhone, Droid or BlackBerry is more than just a phone.

Mobile devices help us manage our time, keep up with family and stay in touch with customers while out of the office. They are also increasingly relied on to provide advice on places to eat, find a great deal on shoes or generally connect with the products and services on which we depend.

This attachment with our “mobiles” provides an opportunity for marketers and brand managers to reach out and engage with customers through a medium we are rarely without.

Easy-to-use branded mobile applications which deliver valuable and engaging content to

your customer when they need it most can be a well-positioned vehicle to leverage this opportunity.

The key here is to deliver true value. Branded applications containing nothing more than a game or infomercial tend to quickly get deleted.

Are you ready to build a branded application? Here are a few issues to consider:

What are your customers looking for?

First, understand the type of content and level of engagement your customers want.

Think through the process of a customer finding, downloading and using your application. What can you provide them that is beyond your Website or marketing one-sheet? Do they only need quick access to updated information, or do they desire an interactive and engaging application experience?

Before building your application, take the time to really understand what your customer wants and how they are going to use it.

Additionally, make sure it is content you can easily keep fresh and updated with the latest information.

Native app versus Web app

Once you have decided to build the application, you will need to decide if you want to build a native application or a Web application.

By definition, a native application is developed for a specific mobile device.

Much like software running on your computer, a native application can process and store content and other information on the device itself.

High-value native applications typically interact with an online application server to transfer and synchronize information when a network is available.

A Web application obtains its content from an online Website. More sophisticated devices such as the iPhone, iPad and Android can store a local copy of the content while offline, but usability in that mode is limited.

How to choose

When deciding which type of application to choose, you will need to weigh several options.

1. Do you want your application available on the iTunes App Store?

If so, then you will need a native application. Even if your application is only accessing online Web content, native applications have the ability to process and store the content on the device.

2. Do you want your customers to have round-the-clock access to your content?

In airplane mode or areas with poor signal strength, your customers may not have access to online content. Will customers care if your application only provides value only when it is connected? If so, how can you engage them while offline?

3. How are you going to update your application and content? Much like an out-of-date Website, if your application's content is stale you can expect customers to not use it.

Since Web applications pull content from online, keeping it fresh means updating your Website. Native applications typically require a more robust online application server to stay updated.

WE ARE ALWAYS looking for new ways to reach our customers.

Having a branded mobile application can increase brand awareness and loyalty. Take the time to choose the right type of content delivered with the right kind of application to ensure that you donot end up with disappointed customers.

Clint H. Parr is president/CEO of MacroSolve Inc., Tulsa, OK. Reach him at clint.parr@macrosolve.com.

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