

COLUMNS

## Brands scratching surface for app's creative use

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One of the areas where advances and innovations are happening most rapidly is in the development of mobile applications.

Marketers of all sizes are looking to develop apps that make it easier for customers to access services and choose the best products for their needs.

Consumers carry around their smartphones and tablets everywhere, so it is only natural for businesses to want to reach out to people on these devices.

Let us look at some of the ways that mobile apps are transforming businesses.

Whatever floats the boat

More companies are finding that helpful apps are a powerful tool for building their brand.

We are seeing the impact of apps in several industries, and this is a trend that is likely to grow in the near future.

Airlines, tour-booking companies and others in the travel industry are coming up with interesting apps that make it easier for customers to travel.

Mobile goes naturally with travel. Apps make it easy for travelers to check their flights, make changes, rent cars, and make lodging arrangements using mobile devices.

Passengers already take it for granted that they no longer need printed tickets or boarding passes if they have the right smartphone apps.

Recently however, some newer innovations are starting to appear.

Consumers booking flights are accustomed to checking various sites to find the best fares. Now we are seeing mobile apps that make this even easier.

Marketers such as Kayak, Google Flights and Hopper are using the latest in machine-learning tech to predict the

prices of future flights. These price estimations make it easier for frequent travelers to save money. Does this technology actually work?

According to Hopper data scientist Patrick Surry, "Our users save an average of \$150 per year on their air travel using the app."

Considering how new this technology is, that is quite impressive.

Kayak has also introduced convenient advantages to travelers with push notifications for the best fares. Its focus on the user's experience combined with machine learning tech has created a wildly popular travel app.

According to Imbert Fung, director for Southeast Asia and India at Kayak, "When you get your hotel or airline confirmation, you just forward it to [trips@kayak.co.in](mailto:trips@kayak.co.in) and it's populated on your app immediately. And on top of that, we send push notifications on your mobile phone when your gate has been assigned, your gate has been changed, if there's been a revision to your depart time. And when you land, we even tell you which carousel your baggage is at."

Thus, the latest mobile apps are taking travel convenience to the next level.

Rather than simply booking your flight online, now you can get constant updates from your mobile phone. This type of technology, of course, has applications in many other sectors as well.

Mum's the word

Health and fitness apps can help people enhance workouts, interact with other users, access useful information and measure their performance. From the standpoint of the company, these apps help build communities and strengthen brands.

Nike was one of the first companies to take advantage of this and built a huge community around its apps.

However, one of the leaders in this field right now is Under Armour, which is currently devoting a great deal of its resources into the area of connected fitness apps. Among its apps are MyFitnessPal and MapMyFitness.

In a conference call, Under Armour CEO Kevin Plank said, "We believe the brands that can build true communities among their consumers by improving their health and fitness will be best positioned."

Thus, the objective is not merely to build lots of great apps, but to create a community where users can connect with one another.

There are also opportunities for companies to zone in on specific niches within health and fitness.

Johnson & Johnson, for example, recently introduced a different version of its 7 Minute Wellness App that is specifically for expecting and new moms.

This J&J app is a good example of an app that is directed towards a very specific niche.

WHILE MOBILE APPS have been around for a while, we are really just scratching the surface when it comes to finding creative uses for them.

From looking at industries such as travel and health and fitness, we can see a few trends emerging:

Apps to enable people to make faster and cheaper decisions in real time, such as finding the cheapest fare

Creating a smoother, more integrated experience, as with Kayak's apps that guide travelers every step of the journey

Communities built around apps, as Under Armour and Nike are emphasizing

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