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Mobile Marketing Mania

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Some experts on the use of mobile apps in the tradeshow business talk about the do's and don'ts of implementing a mobile marketing program from scratch.

By Margo Pierce

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Moving from print (the familiar) to digital (the unfamiliar) marketing doesn't have to be terrifying or complicated. It will require some time and effort, not just to design a marketing plan but also to research the resources that will achieve desired results. Everyone knows the most successful marketing begins before the show starts, while interest and excitement are building, so the marketing consumer is more receptive to your message.

Simply defined, mobile marketing is promotional activity specifically designed to be accessed via a mobile device like a smartphone or tablet computer. But it takes more than changing your brochures into electronic versions of the same things, according to Mark Z. Smith, digital project manager for Freeman XP.

The first step is recognizing the value of digital. Electronic materials can be created and updated before, during and after a show at little to no cost. Interactive components such as embedded video can be used to engage participants. And the return on investment can be easily and immediately identified with data.

"If I'm a sponsor and I've always sponsored the print directory—say I give $30,000—do I know that 10,000 sets of eyes saw my logo? Not really, because how many of those go in the garbage can?" Smith says. "But if I'm sponsoring a mobile app, I'm on the splash page when it first pops up, I'm in the category search, I'm in the exhibit page search. It's a dynamic logo in that I can touch it."

Every touch of that sponsor logo is trackable, he says. The show manager—and, ultimately, a sponsor—can know who looked at that logo, how many times they looked at it and as much information as the show manager can supply about them.

"I know if they're important to me," Smith says. "The analytics are more powerful to me than just a banner that was hanging for three days."

James H. Capo with Public Safety Cygnus Business Media agrees.

"Events are perfect for collecting tons of information about users and their behavior," Capo says. "Syncing your registration systems with your mobile app is critical. You then not only are able to analyze user data, but you can even start targeting specific users based on their registration info, booth visits, materials viewed, etc. The ancillary revenue streams and lead generation opportunities that are possible from collecting mobile event data is absolutely enormous."

Components of an app enable and enhance mobile marketing activities, starting with the kind of content that traditionally had been in a printed guide, according to Jay Tokosch, co-founder of Core-apps. That means a map of the showfloor, exhibitor list, information on sessions and additional activities. Because all of this information is electronic, materials can be connected to specific activities and content for effective cross-promotion.

But for e-mail, QR codes, web sites, digital signage and advertising to be successful, the people doing the marketing—show managers and exhibitors—need to remember that it's all about making connections.

"There's a lot of communication going on…what I call a lot of interactivity between the event organizer and the users, the users and the exhibitors," he says. "We want to promote that experience of connection between them, but also an experience of a connection between the attendees with each other—that's social networking."

Marketing activities to enhance that connectivity might be a game such as a scavenger hunt—QR codes placed at different

locations and booths around an exhibit hall that attendees could scan in order to collect points, badges or something valuable. Another option is an exclusive, on-site social networking resource that connects all participants but doesn't require anyone to "leave" the show to use an outside resource such as Facebook or Twitter.

"The cell phone sits on the nightstand next to their bed, (people) take it into the bathroom with them—it goes with them everywhere 24 hours a day, 365 days year," Tokosch says. "People have the ability to communicate and stay in touch. This is the only media we've ever seen to date that can do that. This is an opportunity for you to utilize that particular communication style."

An important lesson learned by those with experience is how to make cost-effective mobile marketing decisions. One such lesson Capo shares is not getting caught up in the new-is-better sales pitch. Reuse what works.

"With each of our large public safety tradeshows (Firehouse Expo, Firehouse World and EMS World), we have developed and released show-specific apps," Capo says.

"Instead of releasing a brand new app each year, we update the past year's app and push the new app out to the same audience that downloaded last year's app. This way—as long as the users (have) not deleted the app, and most do not—we retain the audience from the previous year and can begin promoting the current year expo (registration dates, hotel dates, announced speakers, etc.). I don't understand why events make me go back to the app store. You already have a built-in user base with the previous year's app, so use it!"

SIDEBAR #1

DO THIS

Start Early
Give yourself a good 12 months to really get a game plan together and draw up a mobile marketing strategy. If you don't yet have a mobile app and you're looking to add one, do not wait until a month or two months before your event to start thinking about it.

Choose the Right Integrated App Developer
The app builder needs to collect and integrate information from a multitude of sources and content providers … floor maps … sessions … exhibitors … registration information. It's all collapsing into one central point, which is your app. That is the most important part of the process: getting your content in and taking you through that process.

Capo also points out that making sure your app can run on all mobile operating systems is essential to maintaining good data.

"Remember that not all devices are the same," he says. "The user experience is critical. If the user experience is bad on a specific platform you will lose a large majority of audience as well as dilute the data you can capture."

Content, Content, Content
It is, you know, king. The good news is that mobile apps can be updated all the way up to and through the show itself. It is vital that your content be completely up to date. It is also vital that you have complete information from exhibitors. In some cases, you will have the ability to tie in audio and video to help attendees make educated choices about which booths they need to visit. At the same time, that up-to-date, relevant content helps exhibitors promote their reasons for being at your show in the first place.

Keep (Everybody) in Touch
Mobile devices make all forms of communication and access to information possible. Connecting a pre-show planner with a mobile device to keep all that information handy is the first step. Making it easy for everyone to connect to conventional social networking and digital resources (mobile web sites, RSS feeds, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) supports and promotes connectivity of participants and spreads marketing messages during the show. Be thoughtful about leveraging this access for better communication before and during the show.

DON'T DO THIS

Rush App Development
A successful app needs to be "robust," according to Smith. If it's not very well thought out, the demographic groups that use mobile the most—GenX, GenY, Millennial—will try it once and then "never go back and use it again."

"You don't want to fail like that," Smith says. "(The) younger demographic interacts with it, and that's really who you want to capture because those are going to be the future leaders at these shows coming down the road."

Create Pointless Ads
Ads that have only a logo, no booth number, or only connect to the company web site are wastes of everybody's time. There needs to be a reason for all attendees (exhibitors and attendees alike) to make them click on the ad to get in touch before the show, request information or stop by a booth.

"It's not enough to just put your logo up there," Tokosch says. "If you want to do that, you might just as well hang a banner from the ceiling because you're just going to get the same kind of response. Be interactive. You want to get something back by having that banner ad."

Think Mobile Marketing Is a Fad
"We're just scratching the surface on it today," Tokosch says. "It's going to get so much better as we move along technology-wise."

SIDEBAR #2

Potential Hiccups

Some things that can go wrong at a show are simply out of your control. That doesn't mean though that they can't negatively affect the experience of everyone involved, especially if due consideration isn't given to anticipating and mitigating that impact. The first thing is to decide if one of these potential issues matters to your show experience and if it's worth the investment of money and time to address it. These issues aren't new, but when it comes to mobile marketing, they can be overcome.

Internet access
The Issue:
Connectivity might be slow during peak hours, tank completely or fall somewhere along the "pretty much useless" spectrum. Supplemental materials, such as information about your products and services or a whitepaper referenced in a presentation, stored on a mobile-optimized web site, can't be downloaded or social media resources such as Facebook and Twitter won't be accessible for people who are trying to find each other on the showfloor or looking for help to coordinate their participation in the show.

Possible solutions:
• Have a database built into the show app that stores all materials that might be needed so that, when an attendee scans the QR code, the desired information is right there.
• Include a social media resource for attendees in the show app to maintain communications among participants, keeping the sphere of users tight and accessible.

QR code reader failure
The Issue:
No access to the desired information—video, product information, brochures, etc.

Possible solutions:
• The problem might be your printed QR codes. Test them before the show to make sure they are the right size and linked to the correct information.
• Build a QR code reader into your app so that, if there is a problem, it's a quick call to tech support to correct the problem.
• Don't have QR codes to scan. Plan how to use this inexpensive resource to supplement existing marketing efforts and gamification opportunities.

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