PLANNING PRIMER»

ENGAGING ATTENDEES
Does your event need a mobile app?

BY HANNAH WONG, CMP

WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY WHERE PEOPLE ARE CONSTANTLY ON THEIR SMARTPHONES. According a recent article in Time magazine, Americans collectively check their phones more than 8 billion times per day. That's an average of 46 times per day per person, likely more for those in younger age groups.

As meeting planners, we should be asking ourselves, how do we take advantage of this new reality, and do our events need mobile apps?

Do you want your attendees to be engaged?

Almost every event has some sort of networking component, whether it's a cocktail reception or an exhibit hall. Mobile apps can take event networking to the next level. Gamification, social media plug-ins, and in-app chat features are instruments that will increase the opportunity and quality of attendee networking.

Mobile apps are another vehicle to deliver your real-time message. The most successful event apps are designed to work beyond the event. Post strategic content before, during, and after to keep people engaged. Engaged attendees will feel more connected to the host organization and more likely to share their experiences.

Do you want your event to be sustainable?

Apps lend themselves to event sustainability, and not just in the environmental sense. To keep an event viable, it needs to be attractive and offer incentives to its target audience. Mobile apps will appeal to your next generation of attendees, the Gen Xers and millennials. It may be the new, fresh technology that revives a stagnant annual event.

Mobile apps make it easy for attendees who are already on their phones to share their experiences on social media. Each post, share or like increases a brand's reach and exposure. Apps have the potential to bring in additional revenue for your event through sponsorships. Banner ads, push notifications and gamification are all features within apps that sponsors seek out when evaluating sponsor benefits. The sponsorship return alone may justify the cost of the app.

Do you need to cut costs?

We all know that apps can save us money, particularly on printing costs. But apps can also be used in other money-saving ways. For example, set up a photo challenge within the app and have attendees snap the event pictures instead of hiring multiple photographers. Or use the in-app survey feature instead of old-school paper surveys. These usually have higher response rates and save staff hours of labor tabulating the results.

If you answered yes to at least one for these three questions, consider developing an app for your next event. Event apps (if designed properly) will captivate your audience, enhance your brand, and bring in more sponsorship revenue while reducing costs.

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ONE PLACE TO START THE DISCUSSION ABOUT MOBILE EVENT APPS IS WITH YOUR WEB DEVELOPER. There also are various companies that offer free online app development when you do a search for events apps. We'd like to hear from you if your firm develops mobile event apps. *Email the editor at ron.garbinski@tigeroak.com with some details on what you offer.*