To app or not to app

By Carmen Murray, issued by Mobitainment

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The smartphone continues to revolutionise our lives and it has become a central part of our existence of society. It offers us an all-in-one approach to manage our day-to-day lives.

We are observing a monumental growth globally in terms of smartphone penetration, and businesses feel that they all need apps as part of their mobile presence. I hate to break it to you, but an app is not a mobile strategy, and if you are planning to embark on this journey, you would need to look closer to see if you should *appscond* or *appsolutely* go for it.

Here are some guidelines to validate the need for an app:

1) Clean up your back yard

Before you go on your *appventure* the most important thing is for you to ensure that you have the basics right. Before you move on to better things, make sure your backyard is clean. These are important matters to consider:

1. Is your content responsive to mobile and has the user experience continuously optimised and refreshed? If you are planning to bring the lion of mobile to your den, make sure you have a savannah for it to dwell in. When your app is a success, people will talk about it, search for more content, visit your website and explore your social media content. Your potential customers judge you on the look and feel of your brand, your website and user experience, and most definitely your presence on social media platforms. The last thing you want is for people to notice you only have 100 followers?

2. Go to your data warehouse and extract samples of all your historical data. This could be years of competition entrants, dark data (past purchases), Big Data, lost customers etc. Allow for a data scientist to assess the different data sets and analyse it. Frankly, the data doesn't lie, and removing the 'gut feeling' out of marketing is a very good start. Your jaw will drop to the floor with all the information you have access to, and you probably just thought it's a horde of mobile numbers. The insights you will gain from this, will show you the way. It doesn't matter if you are in the FMCG, Retail, Financial Services or Mining industry, same rule applies. Just trust me on this one.

2) Visit the graveyard

Truth be told, for every successful app there are thousands of failed apps, which we refer to as the APP Graveyard. It is fierce competition out there because most users don't download more than 40 apps and those apps that live on the second screen are bound to get deleted. The wakeup calls for apps longevity rests in the "emergency services" on the users' phone. The user will receive frequent reminders to update and maintain apps on their phone and this is the make or break. Take the time and go and investigate why apps end up in this final resting place and if your business goal for the app is not something that can live in a mobi-site? Learn from others mistakes and avoid making the same.

3) Define your market

Having a great idea for an app is not enough. An app should provide real value for a specific group of people and you need to have the end user in mind. Take the time to do your homework, by investigating the following:

1. How the brand's audience currently engages with the brand through advertising using their mobile devices?
2. What type of devices does this particular market own?
3. What do they use their mobiles for? When? Where?

4. Purchasing behaviour using their mobile devices?
5. Does the end user have reliable broadband?
6. Do a competitor analysis to understand how competing brands are performing in the app world, and if there is a big appetite for apps in your industry.

4) What is in it for the end user?

There are many things to consider when you are planning an app, but this is probably the most important one. Here are some of the more important considerations:

1. Is there something similar currently in the app market?
2. Will the app provide value?
3. Is it easy to use?
4. Will your app have a cost associated with it? For first time users, or later?
5. Privacy and security?
6. Can you offer valuable push notifications to nudge the users to use the app, without being annoying?

5) Don't drain the user's device

It is paramount that your app does not drain the end user of memory on their phones, data usage, and importantly, power on their phones. Some apps are so well designed that you don't require to have any data to use the app, so, for example, it can be used whilst flying on a plane, on airplane mode. Look at these options as majority of the market is very sensitive to data usage.

6) Marketing budget

It's time to address the elephant in the room. To develop an app is very costly and between wire framing, concept, design and development it is going to cost you a chunk of money. Once the app is ready to launch to market, further marketing spend is required to drive users to the app to download it as well as a well-thought out in-app messaging strategy to get them to continue to use it. Incentives and Rewards can only go so far, and it will take a lot of commitment to nurture your app to success – and maintain it.

It's *appsolutely* paramount that you validate the need for an app and once you can tick all of the boxes, you are on your way for a very successful journey. We have seen very successful apps in the market place for example Uber, McDonalds Surprise Alarm, WhatsApp and Waze. Your brand might be next, so make it count.

In closing, as Neil Boortz famously quoted "Luck is opportunity met by preparation - and to be prepared or unprepared is a personal choice."

ABOUT CARMEN MURRAY

Carmen Murray is one of the most influential modern marketers in South Africa. Her strong background in content, digital, mobile, innovation, and data analytics allows her to identify emerging trends and conceptualise disruptive communication strategies deployed with precision. The customer and their needs are always at the heart of her approach.
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