

The new role mobile apps play in meeting planning

By Howard Fisher, Dave Weil | 09/15/2011

The presence and effects of mobile technology are everywhere. A recent Nielsen survey reports that smartphones occupy one-third of the mobile phone market, meaning a large portion of the population has on-demand access to information at nearly any time and place. That figure does not take into account the number of people who own tablet computers, netbooks and other devices.

Because of this emerging trend, it is no longer a question of whether an association needs to incorporate this dynamic technology into its meetings, but rather how it can do so effectively and generate revenue at the same time. Mobile apps are helping organizations answer that question with their inexpensive costs and relatively easy-to-use format. Following is a quick look at opportunities to enhance meeting planning with mobile apps.

Immediate, on-site information tool: A great feature of mobile apps is their ability to not only quickly provide information at the touch of the users' fingertips, but also to be instantly updated and deliver breaking news. This is especially important for communicating changes at meetings and conferences, such as booth locations or event times. Mobile apps also provide vendors another touch point with meeting participants. Thousands of participants from around the world can be reached before and during the event. The "schedule" feature is often the most popular among participants.

Sponsorship, advertising and exhibiting platform: Mobile apps are a great way to generate additional revenue for an organization's meetings. Many mobile apps offer the flexibility to customize home screens, which means sponsors' logos and other pertinent information can be displayed prominently each time a user accesses the app. This is attractive to exhibitors, sponsors and advertisers because apps can be downloaded in advance of an event and will likely remain on users' mobile devices after the conference ends.

The Car Care World Expo's mobile app illustrates increased user engagement for the exhibitors that proactively used the technology. Results showed that exhibitors who uploaded handouts and logos to their profiles on the app received 50% of the total exhibitor views. By taking advantage of these free and relatively easy opportunities, exhibitors increase their visibility and showcase their products and services to thousands of participants. Because of their ability to track user activity and report usage trends, apps are able to provide measureable return-on-investment.

Green initiatives: Most associations are not quite ready to consider completely replacing their printed, on-site program guides, but the advantages of also using a mobile app are difficult to ignore. Consider the enormous costs associated with producing an insert for the printed on-site guide to simply notify

participants of a room or time change. Again, mobile apps allow information to be changed instantly and, in most cases, without any additional costs. Also, the meetings industry is facing pressure to reduce its carbon footprint. Mobile apps are tools that help reduce waste and therefore show that an organization is committed to making a positive impact on the environment.

Mobile apps are making a noticeable impact on organizations' meetings. While some associations remain hesitant to adopt this emerging technology, the development and power of apps continues to grow. Organizations that test and ultimately use this technology do so to the benefit of meeting participants, exhibitors and essentially their own bottom lines.

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