

Mobile Apps – Much More than Angry Birds – They’re Big Business!

If you’ve got a smart phone – whether iPhone or Android – you’ve no doubt got it loaded up with apps of one kind or another. Angry Birds and other fun and free game apps are enormously popular, but you probably also have apps from businesses such as Netflix, Redbox, eBay and many others, but you may have never considered launching a mobile application to promote your small business brand.

Both Android and iPhone offer low cost app-development tools that can be used by even a novice who just wants to try their hand at app design. Apps are broadly in a few categories – entertain, inform, shop and utilize.

Entertainment apps run the gamut from Angry Birds and iTunes to Netflix so you can amuse yourself using your mobile phone. Information apps include those that provide data on air travel, train and bus travel, wiki reference sites, news sites and the like. Shopping apps include eBay, Amazon, Red Laser and many, many more. Utilization apps are those like Google Translate, Dragon Dictation, iTorch (flashlight) and iHandy Level.

You need a creative idea that relates in some way to your business that people will enjoy using for one of the above reasons. And don’t even think about charging for your app to create a revenue stream – you’ll most likely just discourage any clients who were considering downloading. Once you have some ideas, you’ll need to check the app stores such as iTunes and Android Market to see if your idea is played out, still hot or emerging.

You may also want to bounce the concept off a few people you trust to give you feedback to see if your idea sounds interesting to them. Here are some ideas to consider:

- If you own a bar, you could offer a signature cocktail designer where people can mix a virtual drink, name it and submit it to your bar for a chance to be a featured cocktail – you could incent them to participate by offering a tasting party for semi-finalists in the competition – offer to post their picture – or free drinks for a night.
- If you own a movie theater, you could offer a make a movie trailer app that would allow people to upload video they shoot and add sound and voice over effects to make their own fun movie trailers – you can offer ongoing incentives for the best trailers each month in the form of a movie pack for two (tickets, drinks, popcorn and candy) and discounts for participants.
- If you own a gym, you could offer a virtual personal trainer that would allow consumers to enter their measurements, height and weight as well as interests and limitations and generate a training program that correlates to equipment in your specific gym and then offers a free trial to your gym – the app could prompt them to rotate through machines, enter information about reps and allow them to update their vital stats as they lose weight.
- If you own any kind of business, you could design a simple game that ties somehow into the theme of your establishment or is silly nonsense, but engaging fun where the consumer can

accumulate points by playing and these points then translate into discounts at your business – people love free games!

To promote your app, you can announce the launch via text to your opt-in list with links to download it from the app stores along with an offer tied to the download. In-store signage, stickers attached to packaging or products and reminders from sales associates can also trigger downloads.

Mobile apps downloads and usage are on the rise according to a recent study by Juniper Research. The firm estimates that by 2016, 66 billion mobile apps will be downloaded compared to 31 billion downloaded in 2011. 87% of these are free downloads.

Windsor Holden, who prepared the report for Juniper Research said, “Brands that wish to remain competitive have turned to apps as part of an integrated multichannel distribution system.”