

How to Attract Attendees and Sponsors with Mobile Event Applications

Sponsors help make the world of events go round. And never has the competition for sponsorship dollars been more fierce. With over two million U.S.-based events competing for an estimated 28 percent of total corporate marketing budgets, air show organizers must find compelling ways to attract supporters.

Access to attendees, event signage, website real estate, exhibition space and placement, among other opportunities... these have come to be expected. Events gaining the lion's share of sponsorship budgets understand that sponsors want more than just visibility. They want to interact with and engage spectators and potential customers. Mobile apps provide yet another chance to reach people and sell their product.

And why wouldn't sponsors want to go mobile? According to the Pew Research Center, as of January 2014, 90 percent of American adults have a cell phone; 58 percent of American adults have a smartphone.

"Events are about the vendors, sponsors, and performers and engaging the spectator," says Michael Patrick, a CrowdTorch by Cvent senior sales executive specializing in the air show industry. "Event apps allow organizers to reach out and interact. Our viewing habits are shifting towards mobile and it is an event's responsibility to engage with their audience the way the audience wants to engage."

The proliferation of mobile devices makes mobile one of the most, if not the single most, relevant pathway to reaching spectators and fans, and to connecting those individuals with event organizers, sponsors, and vendors. Attendees may visit an air show's website two or three times prior to its start. But how many times do you think they look at a mobile device during your event? Sixty-seven percent of cell phone owners, according to Pew Research, check their phone for messages, alerts, or calls even when they don't notice their phone ringing or vibrating. What if during those times you were sending push notifications with performer bios, sponsor messages, or vendor specials? Every attendee, sponsor and vendor gets exactly what they want: relevant information when it's wanted and additional exposure in front of potential customers.

"Aside from the added sponsor value, mobile event apps are also relied upon by organizers to facilitate event logistics and marketing," said Patrick.



From displaying event schedules and communicating important updates, to delivering supplemental content and posting real-time social media feeds, mobile applications can present a win-win to organizers, attendees, and sponsors.

Mapping out the user experience is the first key component. Your mobile app strategy should begin with the idea of interaction. The goal is to create a window that provides spectators and potential attendees with exactly what they want and can be with them anywhere.

"Your mobile app can be whatever you need it to be," says Patrick. "Organizers can add functionalities for real-time traffic and parking updates, to buying tickets and merchandise to where the hot dog vendor is in relation to their current location."

In other words, organizers can address issues of frustration that can emerge from the spectator experience, and then eliminate them.

So, what does it cost to develop a mobile app? That's a lot like asking how much does it cost to buy a car or build a

house; it depends on what kind of car you're buying or house you're building. A fully loaded SUV costs a lot more than a Honda Civic. A modest house in the Midwest costs a lot less to build than a modest house in Washington, D.C. Still, it is possible to give some rough guidelines on app development costs.

According to TechCrunch, a 2012 survey of 96 mobile app developers showed the average cost to develop an app was \$6,453. An article on OS X Daily about iPhone development costs reported that the development cost range for "small apps" is \$2,500 to \$8,000.

"Could you ask your neighbor's son who builds apps as a hobby to develop an app much cheaper? 'Sure.'" said Patrick. "The problem is, like most things in life, you get what you pay for. And, is your neighbor's son going to be around when the event takes place to make updates and fixes?"

Patrick says that when you're considering a company to develop your app, you want a company that is going to be around for a while that will build your app in such a way that you can make easy adjustments and add or tweak features. Event organizers need agility and they need an app developer committed to the user experience. Also, it's important to remember to develop your app for iOS and Android platforms.