



Taking Luck Out of the Equation – Interact, Learn and Measure with Mobile Apps

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The online world is colliding with the offline, rendering the smartphone a remote control for life.

Three years ago, one may have hit a city street in the hopes of hailing a taxi. Today, ridesharing companies have made that ride a near certainty. These

types of companies are creating a thin digital layer on the physical world's taxi infrastructure, which is made up of cars, human drivers and roads. Users can see their car coming towards them on their phone at the same time that their real-life car is coming towards them in the physical world.

Apps for such services are taking the luck out of the equation, improving chances for a positive outcome, and enhancing real-life experiences at the speed of the Internet.

In the technology space, this concept is referred to as “Assisted Serendipity.” It’s time to use this powerful combination of data, context, and analytics to help drive positive outcomes from physical meetings and events, all through a well-designed mobile strategy.

The good news is that the vast majority of meeting planners have already realized the potential of mobile use for events and are deploying event apps at an ever-increasing rate. The real challenge for meeting planners today lies in understanding and taking advantage of the full value of an event app.

Choosing the right app partner, then providing the optimal mix of content and functionality will address the planner’s need to:

- › **Inform:** Provide attendees with the information they need to ensure they have the best event experience possible.
- › **Engage:** Transform passive attendees into active participants by enabling them to interact with each other, hosts, sponsors, exhibitors.
- › **Analyze:** Empower the meeting planner to gain insight and value from the wealth of data generated via the meeting app.

Choosing The Right App for Your Event

Today’s meeting planner has many distinct technology needs – event registration, attendee management, expense management, customer relationship management (CRM), and marketing automation among possible others. Throwing a mobile app into the mix can feel like the proverbial straw that breaks the camel’s back. As such, there is a growing desire for an end-to-end event technology solution, or at least a means to consolidate and do more with fewer solutions.

For example, some event registration systems offer mobile capabilities. This can indeed be a very attractive option and, in some instances, may be a good one for a meeting planner. It is important, however, to understand if this consolidated approach enables the desired capabilities and can perform as well as two separate solutions. Meeting planners should evaluate their options to determine whether what they gain from a simplified, streamlined solution does not sacrifice functionality. It is critically important to evaluate each independently.

With event apps, as with any type of software, your particular event goals should be considered and used as the criteria for selecting the ideal mobile app provider. Planners should start by creating a list of the features that will help them achieve their unique event goals, and then compare that with the offerings of potential vendors.

Attendees should be able to access critical event information even if the Wi-Fi network goes down.

Make sure your event app offers an offline mode and that event information, such as the agenda, speaker bios, and exhibitor lists, are downloaded and stored (cached) locally on the device.

If you have a last-minute change to your agenda, or other important information to communicate with attendees, consider a push notification to send an alert to everyone's mobile device.

To ensure this list is complete, meeting owners need to consider the right questions: What do I want my attendees to get out of this event? Is it an internal company event or an external conference? Do you have speakers? Exhibitors? Multiple tracks? The answers to these questions will help you determine the features that matter most.

For example, if the event has exhibitors, one might need an app that does in-app badge scanning and lead scoring. If hosting speakers, attendees should be able to rate sessions afterwards for quick and easy assessment of each session. Live polling may be desirable, to give the speakers the ability to interact seamlessly with their audiences, even change their content on the fly. For an internal event, an engaging social platform might help ensure the app reflects the company culture and elicits excitement from the employees.

Every event is different, and an app strategy should be tailored to best suit the event's specific needs. It is important to prioritize the user experience, and not to sacrifice important features for the sake of convenience.

Integration is also an option. There are many best-of-breed providers who build simple integrations with other systems that are in use, so that multiple solutions come together and behave as one.

The bottom line? Focus on maximizing event success rather than minimizing vendor count. When it comes to attendee experience, the tools can make all the difference.

Setting Up Your App for Success

PART 1: THE ESSENTIALS

The most basic element of your mobile application is its content. Your event app should house all pertinent event information, from session descriptions to speaker bios and exhibitor details. Most importantly, it should be easy for you to make updates on-the-fly that are instantly reflected in the attendee's hands to ensure information is distributed efficiently across the full attendee base.

More content-specific features, such as interactive floor maps, give attendees the ability to get from one session to the next in a seamless manner. Other things to consider would be access to other critical information, such as how to access Wi-Fi, transportation information, lodging details and specifics on evening activities.

An event app's scheduling tool is one of the most important items in your arsenal. Giving attendees the ability to see a schedule at a glance, filter by topic, theme or badge type, build their own agenda and receive notifications, ensures a smooth event for all involved.

Session descriptions should be succinct, and feature an attention-grabbing title, intended takeaways, date, time and location, and speaker information. For large conferences, session descriptions should also be linked to the room location on the interactive map so attendees can quickly find their way from one session to the next.

PART 2: FACILITATING INTERACTION & ENGAGEMENT

While the educational aspect of a conference is important, many attendees cite networking as a primary reason to attend an event. Whether they share tweets and Facebook updates, or have a lengthy conversation over a cup of coffee, attendees agree they learn more from having a conversation than they do from any other aspect of a conference.

Interactive capabilities within an app, such as the ability to post a status update, “like,” comment, and interact with other attendees or exhibitors provide an additional social setting that remains open 24/7, long after the hallways and conference rooms go dark.

Provide attendees with a social experience similar to what they are already used to on social networks like Twitter and Facebook. Allow them to post status updates detailing what sessions they’re in, what they’re learning, and what they’re looking forward to. They can comment on each other’s posts, share photos, use hashtags to sort conversations, and mention other attendees in their own updates or comments. The app technology gives everyone involved with the meeting or event — from the organizers, to the sponsors, to the attendees — an opportunity to be heard.

The social interaction provided by the app could encourage attendees to “follow” each other. By following each other, attendees are notified when someone posts a status update, which leads to more interaction and familiarity

when they meet up with each other offline. And this scenario doesn’t apply just to attendees. Speakers, sponsors, and even organizers can benefit from chatting in the app.

Gamification is a great way to encourage networking, interaction and participation in the application. By rewarding users for taking specific actions with digital rewards, such as points and badges, gamification can turn an event into a competition in the best way possible. Part of the reason gamification is such a successful strategy is because it taps into our most basic instincts and desire for competition and achievement.

For example, you can customize the game mechanics of your event app to offer in-app badges (achievements) for taking specific actions such as following a certain number of other attendees, and checking into sponsored receptions, exhibitor booths, and sessions.

Attendee surveys provide important feedback to conference organizers, speakers, and sponsors. Attendees are encouraged to give real-time feedback via the application rather than be asked to think about their experience days or weeks after the event has ended. This impacts more than just completion rates by giving the organizer valuable feedback that they can use to shape the meeting experience in real-time.

Speakers can use live polling in the application to make their sessions more interactive to collect real-time feedback and tailor the content of their presentation in the moment. Doing so helps the

The beauty of the app is that everything is in one place without having to switch to different platforms or printed materials. Having the social elements combined with all the other benefits of the app helps to elevate the attendee experience.

Organizers should consider how they use promoted posts not only for sponsors, but also for their own communication with attendees. For example, organizers can notify attendees of special deals or opportunities during the event, room changes and more.

speaker ensure they are providing valuable information to their audience while improving the overall event experience for attendees.

Interacting via a private social community is fun, but event owners and sponsors like to see activity extend beyond the app as well. For many events, it's important to see buzz on social networks because it can drive attendance and sales for future events. When a user syncs his or her social profiles to their profile in your event application, they can seamlessly push status updates out to those social networks directly through the application, helping to elevate both themselves and the event across social media.

Leverage push notifications to drive engagement in your application while keeping attendees up-to-date on the latest schedule information. Push notifications are updates that appear on a user's mobile device at a desired time to deliver relevant calls to action for attendees and encourage interaction. Push notifications can show up on all

users' screens or can be segmented to specific groups of users, provided those users have elected to receive push notifications.

Location-based messaging is a great way to drive engagement with attendees. For example, when an attendee comes within close range of a key sponsored booth, a beacon (using low-energy Bluetooth) can trigger a welcome announcement to the attendee as he or she physically approaches. This not only gives the exhibitor more exposure to attendees, but is relevant to the attendee.

PART 3: DATA, ANALYTICS, AND INSIGHTS TO DEMONSTRATE ROI

Digital marketers have been able to make data-driven decisions for years – making tough calls on where to put dollars using hard numbers and data. Like digital marketers, meeting planners are faced with difficult decisions every day and must constantly fight to demonstrate the value of face-to-face meetings.

Sometimes you go with your gut, experience, or intuition, but whenever possible you pay attention to all the data in front of you to ensure the best possible outcomes.

Knowing your attendees' habits and how they react to different experiences and opportunities is crucial to planning future events, as well as attracting sponsors and exhibitors moving forward. Your event app needs to have a solid analytics dashboard that gives you a clear picture into your event's performance to calculate and demonstrate return on investment (ROI).

With an app that has an engaging social layer to it, like the features mentioned earlier, you have the ability to capture compelling insights and data that can help demonstrate event return on investment. You might also use the data to create reports for your internal team, media kits, one-sheets, and other marketing collateral for your meeting or event.

Through your event app's insights dashboards, you should be able to

answer the following questions while your event is happening:

- › What is the overall sentiment of my attendees?
- › Who are my most popular and influential speakers?
- › Who are my most influential attendees?
- › Which of my sessions are receiving the most buzz?
- › Which topics are my attendees most interested in?

As mobile applications become commonplace at events, a wealth of attendee data becomes available, changing the game completely for meeting planners.

With new access to a wealth of in-app engagement data, you could have the ability to measure and demonstrate success just like your digital marketing counterparts. Fighting for budget is no longer a challenge, and we can start to take luck out of the equation for events, improving outcomes for every event stakeholder.

There's no such thing as bad feedback. Use all the data you gather through the insights as an opportunity to grow — even if some feedback isn't entirely positive.



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