

Evaluating the app-opportunity

By  Lynette Hundermark

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"There's an app for that" is one of the most common phrases exchanged amongst smartphone owners. From hailing a taxi, to checking your bank balance, there is almost an app for everything. However, as a brand or SME who has not yet jumped onto this app bandwagon, should you rush in headfirst and join in? With already over 1.5 million apps in each app store (looking at just Apple and Google), should you really add another app to that list?



For the last seven years, I've been fortunate enough to work with brands in their apps execution strategies (back when the word app was literally a buzz word), across a variety of sectors. I've also shared my insights and learnings over the years at conferences and mentored many app student initiatives. To this day, there are still two very basic, but essential points that need to be addressed before embarking on an any app strategy.

1. Who is my target audience for this app?

While this may seem like an obvious point to address, in my experience potential app clients often neglect this basic question. When asking this question, the common answer is "everyone". Have you ever come across a product that appeals to everyone? By everyone I am including children, teenagers, millennials, parents, grandparents, business executives, working mothers, sports fanatics (and the list can go on). Unless you are developing an entertainment app (and there are still specific types of users that need to be identified for that), chances are you will be appealing to a very specific target audience and not everyone.

It is important to identify the target audience as this influences the design and user experience, which are important for the app creation process as different groups of people are likely to use your app differently. Establishing who the target audience is also assists with the platform identification (iOS, Android, Windows Phone, BlackBerry) so that the platform with the majority of the target audience can be considered first. To this day, the most requested platform I get asked to develop apps for is still for the iPhone. However with only 5-7% of the South African audience on this platform (and this statistic has been consistent over the last five years), I often ask my clients if they are sure that this is the best platform to ensure maximum engagement with their target audience.

2. Would my target audience need an app?

This question addresses the “apps for apps sake” bling versus “solving a business or consumer problem” need. Truth be told, there is very little that an app can do which one cannot do on a mobi site. However, apps can offer richer and faster experiences if implemented properly. I’ve also found that there are usually two types of mobile users, those who are hardcore app users and those who don’t really mind what they use as long as they have a mobile-optimised platform presented in a useable format that is apt for the mobile user.

However as a mobile app user, there is the expectation that the app (which has taken effort and time to source and download from the app store using precious and expensive data if not on Wi-Fi) will have more features than a traditional mobi site will offer, otherwise it will just be deleted and never looked at again.

Once these two questions are addressed, and there is a genuine business case for going down the app route then a minimal viable solution (that contains core functionality) can be mapped out and the user experience can be designed. It is also important to realise that investing in an app strategy is very similar to buying a new car and it is not just a once-off purchase. Just as a car is shiny and new one day, but over time there is wear and tear and ongoing maintenance is required, so too are apps.

As a brand, you may have delivered the most beautiful and functional app to your users today, but the new version of Android or iOS will be released tomorrow, which will inevitably impact the performance of that app and your users will have the expectation that the app will just work. Also, should that platform release some new funky features, there will be yet another expectation from your app users that you will cater for those new features sooner than later.

Last but not least, apps must be treated like any product that at the end of the day offers value to your users. In this world where we are inundated with information and volume of choice, people may not always remember the information they are presented with, but they will certainly remember how they felt when using your app. While a high-end smartphone may be able to have over 250 apps, it is usually the apps on the home screen that get frequently used, so give your users a need to download your apps and ideally have them on their home screen.

ABOUT LYNETTE HUNDERMARK

With over 15 years of experience in the tech, digital marketing and mobile solutions space, Hundermark co-founded specialist mobile solutions consultancy Useful & Beautiful. With a passion for developing mobile products that are aligned to business goals, Hundermark's appetite for keeping abreast of the latest industry trends is fast establishing her as an expert tech commentator and opinion leader in South Africa. Follow @lynetteeathony on Twitter.

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