

Mobile apps have changed communication

 By [Louise Marsland](#)

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Mobile applications, or apps as they are known, have fundamentally changed the way people interact with the world, connect and communicate. Many SMEs want to develop products, like apps, to differentiate themselves in the market.



Richard Barry

Polymorph recently gave a presentation at the Stellenbosch University Business School, on when it is appropriate for your business to develop and invest in an app. Polymorph CEO, Richard Barry, was interviewed for Bizcommunity.com on the latest trends in mobile apps:

Q: Where do 'apps' fit into mobile strategy?

A: Apps are simply specialist software tools. A tool should be useful and provide value that is greater than the cost of the tool. Mobile strategy should look at how business can take advantage of the fact that their workforce and customers are probably carrying an internet connected computer with them at all times.

Can this fact be used to make people more productive, can it help your customers in some way to always be able to access your business? When you can find answers to the situations where it would be helpful, you should then ask yourself how the best way is to provide that advantage to the workforce or customer base. What combination of mobile web and apps can provide that advantage to the workforce or customer base, and provide the best return on investment for the business?

Q: Does every business need an app?

A: Most definitely not. Just like not every business needs a boat. Fisherman do, and a boat shop does, but a plumber probably doesn't. Every business these days is a technology business, or should be. But that means every business needs a digital/IT strategy. That could include apps as part of the product offering, but not every business needs an app as part of their products.

Apps are complex and expensive pieces of software to develop. The business case for developing that product should be clear. "Everyone has an app" is not a compelling enough reason to spend that money, and has no measureable return on investment.

Q: Why should marketers and clients invest in apps?

A: An app should form part of a product that addresses a real problem. The return on the investment should be clear and should guide how much can be invested into the product. Approach product development as a journey to find the best fit between a real, prevalent problem in the market, and an innovative solution to that problem. Don't think solution first. Make sure you will solve a real problem.

Then test the assumptions around the product, the market and expected return on investment in the product development. As assumptions are tested, learn from that, and continuously steer the product development. That way you should end up with a product that satisfies a real problem, and that people will pay for, or at least you will learn very quickly whether it won't work. The most expensive way to test all your assumptions are to build the full product and then have it fail in the market.

Q: How should marketers ensure they are mobile-first?

A: Get to know the different mobile technologies and channels, and when each should be used. Don't think mobile vs web. The web is 'mobile only' for most people in South Africa.

Q: What are the most important mobile trends this year?

A: Internet of things; fintech; progressive apps.

Q: The 'defining moment' for mobile in the near future?

A: Mobile as we know it now - a single touch screen device (smartphone) - will look significantly different in 10 years. We'll probably have multiple, connected, wearable devices working together in a Body Area Network (BAN). The visual user interface might be smart glasses or contacts; the input might be provided by a smart ring or arm band that senses the movement of the hand. The processing power and storage will be in another device hidden out of sight.

We don't know what it will look like, but there almost certainly won't be an iPhone 17.

ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

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