

Would you like an app with that?

BY CLARE COULSON

If you're in business then you gotta have an app, right? Well, maybe. Before you rush out and build your new mobile application you need to decide just how your new solution fits into your overall business strategy...

Lie of the mobilescape

Mobile devices have become indispensable extensions of the self, driving massive changes in consumer and business behavior. In Australia more than 50% of the population owns a smartphone, 40% in New Zealand, and the app store – spear-headed by Apple – turned four earlier this year. There are currently 700,000-odd apps available in Apple's App Store, almost 550,000 in the Android marketplace and 60,000-plus apps for Blackberry users. A 2012 survey of smartphone use by Our Mobile Planet showed Australians have an average of 28 apps currently on their smartphone but only used an average of 9.9 of them in the previous 30 days. In New Zealand it is 25.8 apps and an average of 9.7 used. The app marketplace is highly popular, very crowded and ultra competitive.

Needs and wants

As with any business decision, it's the old story of need versus want: you might want an app, but does your business strategy really need one? Some of the desired outcomes that an app can help to achieve include increased sales transactions, increased customer awareness, enhanced customer support and improved convenience for customers doing business with you.

One of the key things in modern business is

to turn the customer experience into a two-way dialogue; developing a relationship and providing constant reminders that you exist through subtle branding exercises. Because of their interactive nature and ability to send push messages to users, apps provide an opportunity for a high level of customer interaction and branding, all in the palm of your user's hand.

Users who have a good experience with your app will tell others about its benefits, so awareness of your app, and consequently your brand, will spread. This in turn could bring you ever-increasing extra revenue without the worry of large overheads or significant return-on-investment requirements. And as customers use your app you can gather data insights into their buying habits.

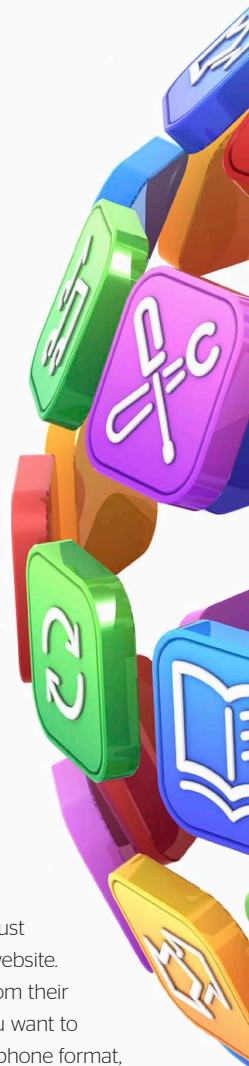
Enterprise software can also benefit its users with a mobile extension that plugs directly into the desktop, so you can offer office-level access to information and the ability to execute business-as-usual tasks even when staff are on the move.

Finding your purpose

Apps are sexy, no question. But if you want an app for your business have you decided what it will actually do? It sounds like a stupid question, but have you really thought about it? Unless you know how your app fits in to your business strategy and

how it will enhance your end users' experience of your brand, then it's money down the drain. You cannot just create a miniature version for your website. Users, including you, expect more from their app experiences these days. If all you want to do is replicate your website in smartphone format, you would be better to invest some development dollars into a mobi-site, and you really should be doing this anyway or you will miss out on a lot of potential visitors and show up in fewer mobile device searches. (ComScore showed that mobile phones and tablets accounted for 13% of all page views in August this year, nearly doubling their share of traffic in one year). No, your app needs to offer more than the content on your website and users will want a greater level of interactivity and customisation options than on your regular corporate site.

To decide what your app will do you need to return to your business goals, and before you commit good money to the project, consider the bigger picture. There is more than one way to skin a cat... and there is usually more than one way to achieve your goals. What are all those ways? How will an app achieve them better than any other way? Do you really need an app? If the answer is still yes, then you can start building it into your mobile strategy and greater business strategy. This way you will be





And what are they looking for when they come to you? Combine these aspects into your app so that it is relevant to its potential users.

Apps are also an extension of your company's brand, so the look, feel and delivery method for the content should be in line with your brand. If your brand is fun and funky, you might think about incorporating game play elements into your app, but if your brand has a more serious side then you will probably just want to stick to your knitting and present your information in a sleek and easy-to-navigate manner. And remember, the less well-known your brand, the more you need to make your app stand out. Household names will be easily found in the app store but unknown brands might want to do something radical to attract a bit of media attention and social media chatter.

Making it happen

Integrating your app with the rest of your mobile strategy and wider sales and marketing strategies is a must for it to be a success. There are a lot of decisions to be made in the planning and creation processes and it is imperative that all the key stakeholders are involved and a clear plan of action is outlined. Mobile technologist Belinda Simcox summarises the key steps you will need to take:

- Identify your key players and resources.
- Decide whether you will resource internally or outsource.
- Assign a dedicated project owner to oversee the whole process.
- Plan, plan, plan: identify your project objectives and how you intend to achieve them.
- Build, iterate, develop, test, test, test.
- Deliver - first internally as an alpha delivery, then in a beta release, and finally a soft launch (don't go for the big bang approach).
- Align all your business systems to back up the soft launch.
- Front load your marketing spend and go out through marketing, PR and online channels, plus get all your staff engaged and using/promoting it, wearing the t-shirt etc.
- Review the launch experience.
- Measure and analyse the results against your business objectives.

able to determine the precise features your app will need to achieve your aims.

Being strategic

You may wish to centre your mobile app strategy on location awareness, to advertise locally and drive users into stores; be an information provider; or offer a searchable database of information that is useful to your client base or target market; perhaps you need it to be purely sales-centric, enabling users to make purchases with a few clicks, or even venturing into the world of the e-wallet, where mobile app users can make transactions directly

with the wave of their smartphones; or you may just need aspects of your enterprise software extended from the desktop into an easy-to-use mobile platform (as discussed in our cover story on p 21). Apps may form the kernel of your overall mobile strategy or just one strand of a many-armed beast including mobile coupons, GPS, mobile marketing and location-based services. Either way, any activity you do around your application needs to sit within your business's core goals, and the app should be viewed as another channel to market or business application tool. Think SoLoMo - social, local, mobile. Think interaction. How do your customers and prospects actually interact with you?

• Continue to support the app and provide ongoing enhancements to build the customer relationship.

The second generation

At a basic level, your app just needs to be user-friendly and straight to the point. The best way to win in the apps stakes is to create something that is both useful and valuable to your target audience. But there are a lot of exciting embedded opportunities available in the mobile application platform that can be leveraged to really make your app work hard for your business.

Forrester Research's Thomas Husson, whose focus is on the consumer product industry, says he expects a new wave of apps is on the horizon. "First-generation apps – aside from gaming apps – rarely made the most of the unique attributes of the mobile platform and were rarely integrated with back-end systems. We believe the market is poised for a second wave of consumer apps that are more personalised and contextual." Here is what he suggests we might expect:

- 'Big data' will enable more contextual experiences on mobile apps.
- We'll see smarter, connected apps.
- There will be a shift from native to hybrid and web apps.
- Multi-platform apps will reign supreme.

He also reiterates Simcox's point on planning and enhancements, saying that a successful app strategy requires a mobile product road map with the constant iteration of new features and services that directly address the evolving needs of consum-

ers. Here are a few basic principles from Husson on how to approach apps as products and define their lifecycles:

- Market apps in the stores and among core target audiences.
- Progressively add new features and services.
- Invest in mobile analytics and surveys.
- Introduce new business models.
- Localise your mobile app approach.
- Use push notifications to drive engagement.

Iterations and improvements


If the focus of energy is in getting the app to market, then Husson suggests it may not be a long-term success. You need to invest just as much time in maintaining, analysing and improving the app and its contents – basically nurture your app audience and spoil them with new and exciting ways to experience your offering.

You can do this to really great effect by drawing on the data your app will provide you. According to Simcox there is "incredible dexterity and depth in the tracking processes available with mobile apps," and this provides a mine of customer behaviour information for the savvy business person.

"Applications can interact with smart device sensors, GPS and other in-built hardware and systems, revealing a far richer data intelligence about usage of the apps, user location, time and context, than potentially any other engagement mechanism. With this ability comes both business opportunity and, of course, ethical responsibility." Depending on what you want to achieve, you can capture the most sim-

plistic information, such as the number of app downloads, to more in-depth details including click logs, click paths, device versions, screen orientation, wi-fi or carrier, active and repeat users, fails and error reports, and removed apps. This type of tracking uses a device's unique identifier, which cannot be blocked by the user, so it's imperative that you be transparent and follow best practice guidelines with accessible terms of service and privacy policy, and seek opt-in permission before accessing data. Privacy issues aside, this granularity of detail means that you can monitor and respond to your customers' behaviour and tweak your app to offer them the best user experience.

What next?

If you are headed for the appo-sphere then find a good developer who takes the time to understand your business and its goals. And make sure that once your app is launched it becomes an integral part of your entire strategy and customer experience. Nothing says '#fail' louder than a deleted app. 



WHICH PLATFORM?

There is a platform war on at present. In the US 51.4% of smartphone owners are running Android, while 34.1% are on iOS, 8.1% on RIM BlackBerry and 5.9% on 'other' platforms as of June 2012. This differs according to country however. And it is also worthwhile considering your target demographic because platform choice may vary there too. In addition, the October launch of Windows 8 is likely to be a disruptive element in the market next year and we can expect to see the amount of Windows platform users increase.

	Android	Blackberry	iOS	Microsoft Windows Mobile	Symbian	Other	Don't know
NEW ZEALAND	41%	3%	32%	6%	3%	2%	13%
AUSTRALIA	25%	3%	49%	4%	8%	1%	9%

Source: Our Mobile Planet survey 2012