



7 TIPS ON

LAUNCHING

A SUCCESSFUL FESTIVAL

MOBILE APP

By Huy Vo



When the Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA), Hawaii's official tourism agency, selected our firm, Bright Light Marketing, to spearhead the marketing efforts of its festivals and events campaign and promote more than 100 of its sponsored events, we quickly huddled as a team to strategize and brainstorm new and creative ways to get the word out about the festivals to Hawaii visitors and local residents.

The idea came fast: Launch a smartphone app serving as a directory for all of HTA's sponsored festivals and events.

It was a natural path for us to take as visitors were quickly changing their habits on getting travel information as fast as technology is constantly changing. With more than 300 million mobile subscribers in the U.S., and 40 percent of them being smartphone users in 2011 according to Nielsen Reports, mobile marketing initiatives such as smartphone apps were quickly becoming mandatory to effectively reach a new breed of visitors and people on-the-go.

Our firm launched the *Festivals of Hawaii* iPhone app on August 4, 2011 for HTA, and generated interest from people

around the world, including other festival organizers who wanted to launch apps for their own events.

We received dozens of questions from festival organizers asking us what they should keep in mind when shopping for mobile app developers, how much they should budget for, how should they promote it, and many, many more questions.

Here are our seven tips on launching an app for your festival or event:

Evaluate the Purpose and Need

Everybody is launching apps, but is it a good fit for my festival?

Before you contact a mobile app developer, it is important to determine the purpose of utilizing a mobile app for your festival. When we put together the app development plan for the *Festivals of Hawaii*, our purpose and objective was to launch a directory of more than 100 of HTA's sponsored festivals and events throughout Hawaii to provide direct and easy access to them at the fingertips of HTA's target audiences, which are visitors from the North America and East Asia markets as well as local Hawaii residents.

Are you looking to build an electronic mobile program for your attendees to use

on site at your festival? Is your goal to incorporate digital interaction between you and your attendees? Most importantly, is your target attendee a smartphone user?

These are the types of questions you have to ask yourself and your team to ensure that mobile app marketing is effective for your event. The ideal app needs to provide value for the user and for your festival. Even if the app meets your objectives, make sure it meets the user's need as well.

"We wanted to incorporate mobile marketing into our campaign efforts because technology is constantly evolving, and this is one of our creative ways to market Hawaii to the world," says Michael Story, tourism brand manager for HTA. "We are very happy that we did so because the *Festivals of Hawaii* app attracted a lot of attention from visitors in our target markets and promotes tourism in the Hawaiian Islands, which is HTA's mission."

Planning the Content

What should I include in my app?

Content is the key component in attracting users to download your app. This should tie in with the purpose and objective of your app development plan, which will then determine the features.

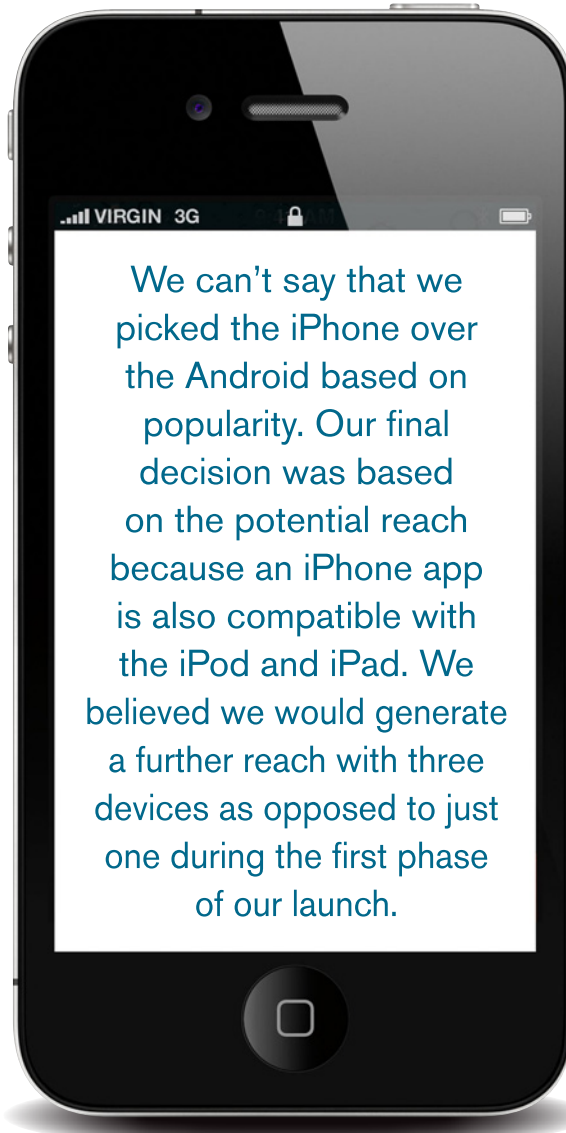
For example, the Ukulele Festival Hawaii built an app that included everything the festival had on its website: background information the festival; program schedule; parking and shuttle information; and a list of participating entertainers, vendors and sponsors. Festival organizers wanted to provide a mobile program for attendees to refer to when walking around the festival and checking out the attractions and offerings.

"Our *Ukulele Festival* iPhone app was set up to replicate our Ukulele Festival Hawaii website, but also to function on its own," says Roy Sakuma, president of Roy Sakuma Productions and Ukulele Festival Hawaii, which attracts more than 20,000 people every year. "The *Ukulele Festival* iPhone app was also designed to help our attendees navigate through our festival with the map feature."

The *Festivals of Hawaii* app was designed as a useful tool for those planning their vacation to Hawaii, or visitors already in Hawaii who want to find out what's happening while they're there and where. Here are the features we decided on:

- Individual listings for more than 100 of HTA's sponsored festivals and events in Hawaii
- Ability to search for an event by date, island and event category

- Each event profile to include one photo, event description and contact information
- GPS capabilities with Google maps installed so that the user can find any event closest in distance to them wherever they are in Hawaii and also find directions on how to get to the event
- Ability to share the event on the user's Facebook and Twitter accounts.



"When building an app for your festival, it is important to keep in mind that you're creating something that has a very specific audience and timeframe that might not be relevant outside the window of your festival," says Melanie Kosaka, president of Uapo, LLC, whose company programmed apps including *Festivals of Hawaii*, *What Chefs Eat* and *Lei Fresh*. "Some things to keep in mind are 'What value will this app provide users? Does the app increase ticket sales or build audience loyalty?'" she adds.

Finding the Perfect App Developer

There are so many companies that can build mobile apps. Who do I choose?

It's important to spend the time to research and find a developer who will make your vision come alive. Interview different developers to see if you like what they propose, do they have the expertise needed and if they can work within your budget.

We took our research to the Internet to find different developers in Hawaii and California and also took referrals from our colleagues. After interviewing several companies by phone, we narrowed down our prospects to three developers and asked them to submit proposals based on our objectives and needs.

Upon receiving proposals from your prospective vendors, make sure you review them closely to compare "apples to apples." One vendor may offer something that the other vendor isn't offering such as building a contact management system for you or including web hosting and technical support in the estimate.

Interviewing your prospects in person will allow you to ask them additional questions and also get a feel of their personalities and working style, which is also important. In addition, this is also the perfect opportunity to negotiate.

"Look for a developer who is organized and can lead a team that includes a database person, designer, copywriter and programmer," says Kosaka. "The most important aspect is to hire someone you can communicate well with and who is willing to walk you through each step if this is the first app you'll be commissioning."

Setting a Budget

How much money should I allocate?

During the interview process, put on your negotiation cap and don't be afraid to work with them in adjusting their cost if it is too high. Setting a budget for developing an app is like setting a budget for building a house. The more complex and detailed you want your app to be, the more money you put towards it. If you're looking for a very simple app with no bells and whistles, your cost will be on the lower end of the scale of about \$3,000 to \$5,000. If you're looking to build a complex app with lots of features, your cost will be on the higher end of more than \$40,000. For the *Festivals of Hawaii* app, we set our budget at \$15,000.

Each of the three prospects we interviewed had excellent backgrounds and could work within our proposed budget.

We awarded the contract to Uapo, LLC because of their expertise in user experience. Even if your app is creatively designed with lots of cool features, it won't mean anything if it's too hard to navigate through or too confusing to use because a user's experience is very imperative in retaining the user after he/she downloads your app.

Designing the Look

How is my app going to look and who is going to design it?

Most app developers will design the look of your app in addition to programming it, and most prefer to keep the creative and technical development under one roof because it's easier that way. Thus, design costs can be included in your estimate, but you have the option of hiring your own designer. Regardless of who works on the creative aspect of your app, it should revolve around your festival logo or brand identity.

iPhone vs. Android

The iPhone and Android are both popular smartphones but my app budget only allows for one of the two phones. Which one should I pick?

The battle between the iPhone and Android on which smartphone is better can spark a debate that can go on for hours. We came across this problem on which smartphone to build the app for during our planning meetings, as our budget only allowed for one smartphone at a time.

We can't say that we picked the iPhone over the Android based on popularity. Our final decision was based on the potential reach because an iPhone app is also compatible with the iPod and iPad. We believed we would generate a further reach with three devices as opposed to just one during the first phase of our launch.

Getting the Word Out

Now that my app is completed, how do I get people to download it?

A marketing plan should always follow the app development plan, because without a solid plan, your new app will be lost among hundreds of thousands of others when it launches.

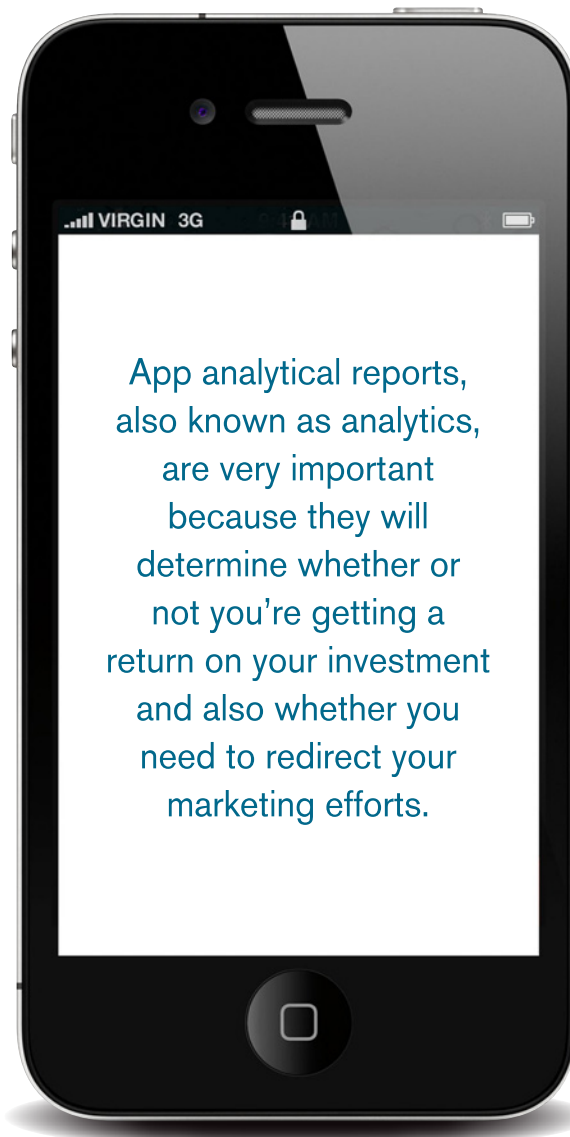
If you can't afford to buy advertising to promote your new app, utilize public relations and send out a press release announcing your new venture. Be sure to target the appropriate print, broadcast and online media in your area or whatever media outlet your attendee follows so that your press release gets to the right people.

Utilize free resources such as Facebook and Twitter to get the word out about your app. Once the news about your app hits

the Internet, it can potentially go viral and in return, generate lots of downloads.

In addition, promote it in all of your festival's collateral pieces and promotional materials such as website, newsletters, brochures, flyers, email blasts and banners.

When we launched the *Festivals of Hawaii* iPhone app in 2011, thousands of downloads were generated within hours as a result of our marketing efforts. We



distributed our press release to local and national media targeting travel reporters, and our app even made the news on a Times Square billboard in New York City! We included the app on all of our print and broadcast advertisements, and also on our quarterly brochure that was distributed to more than 100 concierge desks at hotels statewide. In addition, our social media plan was very effective as we shared the direct link to download the app on HTA's *Festivals of Hawaii* Facebook and Twitter pages and more than 500 people

clicked on the link and downloaded the app within the first hour.

Return on Investment and Retaining Your Users

How do I see results and how do I keep my users from deleting my app?

App analytical reports, also known as analytics, are very important because they will determine whether or not you're getting a return on your investment and also whether you need to redirect your marketing efforts. Analytics provide detailed information such as how many people downloaded your app, how many people are actively using your app, how long did they spend using your app, and even demographic information such as what city, state or country the app was downloaded in.

Mobile app developers may use app analytic services such as Flurry.com or Localytics.com so that you can log on and review updates on your numbers or download reports to share with your team or sponsors.

Through Flurry.com, we were able to see that 85 percent of *Festivals of Hawaii* app downloads were in North America, 12 percent in Asia and the rest from as far off as the Middle East. With this type of useful information, we were able to see which areas we needed to boost our marketing efforts in.

Analytics will also show you how many people actually kept your app on their smartphone after downloading. Continuing to implement new content and updates to your app is key in retaining your users.

"App contents constantly need to be refreshed and updated, and part of your app project plan should include the resources to make these updates," says Kosaka. "If the content stays the same, your app will become stale and people will delete it from their phone."

Monitor reviews from users and festival attendees about your app so that you can find out what you can do to improve future updates. And most importantly, make sure you thank them for downloading your app. They are the ones who will spread the word about your app and help increase downloads.

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