

Apps on

Parade

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In 2013, the festival world is using mobile technology to create online experiences or “Festivals on the Go.” Jason, a teenage boy, buys a 3-day music festival pass on his iPod while hanging out at the pool. At the same time, Jason’s sister is completing the festival princess scholarship application from her iPad and Jason’s mother is busy on her Samsung Galaxy registering to volunteer as a festival beverage server to raise money for her church.

A few weeks later at the festival, Jason’s father checks in on the location finder, FourSquare, and goes to the new festival App to check the performance schedule and find the location of his favorite food booth. Jason’s aunt is busy posting parade photos on Facebook and his sister is posting photos of friends she saw at the festival on Instagram.

This scenario seems realistic, right? After all, everyone has a smart phone and is using online apps. Or are they?

A review of the 2012 Pew Internet & American Experience research certainly shows a substantial decrease in desktop computer sales and a decline in laptop sales. At the same time over the past few years we’ve seen an increase in tablet and smart phone sales. Certainly a move to more mobile devices. And what about Apps? There are over 775,000 Apps in the Apple store.

Many event managers have rushed to build applications believing that this move is necessary to stay on top of the mobile technology curve. However, as we dig into the research, there are facts that might make us question the trend.

It is accurate that 88% of all American adults have cell phones. Many perceive that the vast majority of cell phones are smart phones. *But the reality is that 45% of Americans own smart phones, down slightly from 47% in 2011. And only 19% own a tablet.*

We can expect that the growth in smart phone sales will regain momentum if the economy continues to improve and as the large millennial generation becomes a larger portion of the workforce. Additionally, phone companies continue to eliminate non-smart phone options making smart phones more ubiquitous.

So what about Apps? We use Apps to bank; get the news and weather; enjoy social media and track our workouts. Is it safe to assume that Apps for events are not only helpful tools but an absolute requirement for remaining relevant? What was the number? 775,000 Apps in the Apple store?

Many phones are now sold with Apps on them in addition to Windows 8, as they attempt to keep up with the mobile movement. *But more than 60% of Apps have never been downloaded and about 25% of Apps that make it past download are never used.*

The trends are undoubtedly moving in the direction of smaller and mobile. But before building that expensive festival App, event managers need to consider success measurements and a strategic plan for mobile marketing.

Most event managers don’t plan, they just build and put something in the App store. Counting App downloads provides very little insight because most people never use a free App after the initial download. You need much more data and targeted measurements about how the App is used to understand your return-on-investment.

For some events, the App is an investment in the future and an outreach to a younger, more affluent portion of the society. For others, mobile friendly programming makes more sense and cents.

If I were to make a prediction, I predict the move to mobile devices will force a convergence of the web and Apps. This convergence will cause a substantial change in our marketing efforts.

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