



A Love Connection: Smartphones, Tablets and Apps

By Ellesor Holder

Devices: Your Love Connection

For many of us, it is love at first sight. For others, it takes time and nurturing. But regardless of how you get involved, Festival and Event planners around the world are fully committed to their smartphones, tablets and apps.

A Lasting Relationship

In the last 5 years, the way we communicate with virtually everyone in our lives, personally and professionally, is through the devices we hold in our hands.

In fact, according to the ICT Data and Statistics Division of the Telecommunication Development Bureau, there are 6.8 billion mobile-cellular subscriptions in the world today which is about how many people there are on earth.

Smartphones make up a billion of those subscriptions and the market is expected to just keep growing with a 27% increase to over 900 million units sold this year.

Our love goes beyond our mobile phones, we also can't live without our tablets either. Sales of tablets are expected to increase by almost 50%, to over 190 million units sold, according to research by the International Data Corporation (IDC).

The designs may change. The shapes may morph. The colors may get brighter. But we love our hand-held, mobile devices.

Attached at the Hip

Look around and you'll be hard pressed to see anyone without their smartphone or tablet in their hand, on their hip or in their purse or briefcase. We are chatting, texting and sharing at lightning speed. How many times a day do you think you check your mobile phone? Twenty times a day? Fifty times a day? More?

In a study by Kleiner Perkins Caufield and Byers, researchers found the average user actually checks their phone close to 150 times per day. In their annual Internet Trends report carried out in May this year, the researchers discovered people check their phones, on average, 23 times a day for messaging, 22 times for voice calls and 18 times to get the time. Leading up to and during a festival or event, those of us in the industry probably blow those numbers into the triple digit 4G-sphere. So with these devices such a part of our lives, what are the ways Festival Directors and Event Planners are utilizing today's mobile technology?

The Heart of Building a Relationship

No surprise here. Texting is at the heart of it all when it comes to communication. However, the reasons vary. Kimberly Starnes, Festival Director of the South Carolina Strawberry Festival in Fort Mill, SC stated, "Texting is key for us especially when we are on site and there is so much noise surrounding us. We can quickly and easily communicate an important message with each other and keep moving. We also can share pictures through texting which is more private and can help us be prepared for a situation whether with a sponsor, volunteer or festival attendee."

Charlie Barrineau, City Manager of Uptown Greenwood, South Carolina reports that texting is how he, his staff and City Council members stay on top of breaking news and important information during an event. It allows them to respond quickly and have just the facts at hand. Most importantly, Barrineau can send a group text and reach everyone in one swoop so everyone involved no matter where they are at the time have the information.

An App Affair

"We love the scheduling app Doodle.com," reported Starnes. "With our Team Leaders and volunteers so busy with their own jobs and lives, Doodle helps us coordinate times and dates for meetings easily in the months and weeks leading up to the South Carolina Strawberry Festival." This app even incorporates a calendar.

For me, I couldn't live without iThought for managing all 36 events of the South Carolina Festival of Flowers in Greenwood, SC. I find this app essential for keeping up with all the different aspects of each event. This app promotes itself as a mind-mapping tool that "enables you to visually, organize your thoughts, ideas and information." I say it is a mind-memory tool and

it keeps me on task and organized down to the smallest details of every event and activity. Plus I can share the iThought mind-mapping charts with Event Chairs and committees even if they don't have the app. I just share it as a PDF. You can also be as creative and fun as you want using the functions of iThought.

Scott Huntley, Festival Director of the Columbus Arts Festival feels, "The most important app and program I use for working and exchanging information is Dropbox. I can work on a document on my computer in the office put it in Dropbox, then continue to work on it on my iPad while at the airport and then finish working on it at the hotel that night." He added, "I can have files, images and documents shared and edited or revised quickly and then easily accessible. Dropbox is by far one of the best tools available on the internet today."

On average, those of us with a smart-phone have 26 apps lighting up our screens according to Google's Our Mobile Planet data. But we have access to over 1.5 million apps in the Apple App Store and Google Play. However, the statistics show that 1 in 4 apps downloaded are abandoned after the first use. The ones that stick are the ones that make us more organized and more in control.

Take for example, CloudOn. I can open, edit, and save existing documents via my iPhone or iPad using CloudOn. Best of all, it works with Dropbox and also Google Drive allowing me to access my Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint files which I use on my desktop in my office. I can open them, and then easily make edits and changes. Like a lot of people today, I am using both Microsoft and Apple operating systems so an app like CloudOn is essential to my work.

In Sync With Your New Love

Keynote and PowerPoint are two of the most classic presentation tools that turn graphs, words and pictures into impressive presentations. Darrell Manis, an Events Director with the Gatlinburg, Tennessee Convention and Visitors Bureau says iPads are an integral part of their staff's daily work now. "It is just perfect for making presentations to businesses and sponsors. Depending on the size of the audience, we will either project the presentation onto a screen or just use the iPad itself."

Whether you are meeting a sponsor for lunch, sharing details with your Event volunteers or making a formal presentation to a packed auditorium, you can show them dazzling images and important data using your tablet. On Mashable.com, writer Sarah Ang listed these shining star programs for making a "killer" pre-

sentation: Preze, Google Presentations, Haiku Deck and Project.

In keeping up with the latest news about the Columbus Arts Festival, Scott Huntley reports, "We also love tools like Google alerts. It feeds our collective ego" he said with a chuckle, "and allows us to see immediately what press we are getting through blogs, articles or web pages which lets us see how we are showing up on the internet."

Keeping the Flame Alive Socially

We all know the power of Facebook for spreading the word of our events and interacting with our followers. But many of the Festival Execs and Planners I spoke with also reported using the "Groups" Feature to communicate with staff and volunteers. You can still share updates, photos, documents and messages but it is just with the people you include in the Facebook group. Best of all it is totally private among the members.

Manis stated that is one of the ways the staff at the Gatlinburg, Tennessee CVB communicates with each other. "We may post a picture in our private Group page on Facebook and that way we can see it collectively, make comments and then decide to post it to the public page or not," he said.

Another benefit of Facebook Groups is you can share your Dropbox files within the group. So no matter where you are in the world and what device you are working from, if you use Dropbox, you have access to all your images, files and documents and can share on Facebook with the people helping you coordinate and organize your Festival or event.

Remembering...Everything

How in the world do you keep up with it all? Sharing information is one critical aspect of a Festival Director or Event planner's job. But remembering all the details is another feat to master. Sure you can place a Post-it-Note on virtually every surface of your office, car and bathroom to remind you of your tasks. Or you can look to an app like Evernote. It too works across all devices (and computers) and allows you to save, clip, research, share, collaborate, link, and plan and, best of all, keep everything that is important to you all in one place.

There are plenty of useful apps to choose from for helping you stay organized and on task. Portio Research is forecasting 82 billion apps will be downloaded worldwide this year. All you have to do is take the time, ok, find the time, to experiment with a few and then choose the ones that fit with the way you and your mind works. Then stick with

those apps. The last thing you need or want is for all this technology to overwhelm you and keep you at the bottom of the learning curve.

A Marriage Made in Cyber-Heaven

Do your own research by surfing the web for popular or highly rated productivity apps and programs. Ask your colleagues for advice. Read reviews. Consider the apps listed in this article. Get to know the features. Then go ahead and commit. If you're a little tentative, download the free ones first. When you're ready to take the app leap of faith, download the ones with a fee. You won't regret it. And you'll live and work happily ever after.

Apps Worth Flirting With

- 1 Evernote
- 2 Eventbrite
- 3 Doodle
- 4 Plancast
- 5 Dropbox
- 6 iThought
- 7 Cloudon
- 8 SoundGecko
- 9 Skype
- 10 eFax

Social Networking Apps You'll Just Love

- Tried and True:
- 11 Instagram
 - 12 Twitter
 - 13 Facebook
 - 14 Pinterest
 - 15 Google+
 - 16 Foursquare
 - 17 Hootsuite
 - 18 Evite
- Making More of a Scene:
- 19 Vine
 - 20 Quora
 - 21 Snapchat
 - 22 Pic Stitch

Ellesor G. Holder has an extensive background in advertising, marketing and PR. Three years ago, she went from a volunteer Event Chair to the Executive Director of the South Carolina Festival of Flowers in Greenwood, SC. This year, the Festival celebrated 46 years and hosted 36 events in the month of June with their Uptown "Safari" themed Topiary Display as the main attraction. The Festival also achieved record numbers in attendance and economic impact. In 2012, Holder received the IFEA's Daniel A. Mangeot Memorial Scholarship for acquiring the CFEE Certification. She plans to receive her designation at the Annual IFEA Conference in 2014.