

How Small Businesses Can Best Leverage Mobile Apps



Whenever you start a new job as a marketer, you not only have to learn how to navigate a new organization, which communication tools your new company uses, and where the bathroom is – you need to learn what is often (to you) an entirely new industry.

You need to learn who your customers are, what they care about, what their challenges are, what they need to do to get promoted, and ultimately what value they get out of the products that your new company is offering them. No small task.

I've come to know a startling amount about topics ranging from property management to data visualization (a fancy way of saying making large data sets more easily digestible with charts, graphs, and the like). Believe it or not, becoming an expert in property management or visualizing data sets was not something that I dreamed of as a young boy – but developing a deep understanding of both did become critically important to my success as a marketer.

I set out to learn as much as I could about the true value of mobile applications to small businesses. After property management and data visualization, how difficult could that possibly be? After all, practically everybody is familiar with and uses mobile applications in this day and age. Personally, I find myself making restaurant reservations using Opentable, hitching rides in an Uber or a Lyft, or paying a friend back for drinks using Venmo each and every week. But as I reflected on the use of mobile applications with the small businesses that I am a customer of, my own use of SMB mobile apps began to paint a pretty interesting picture. Let's start there.



Why a mobile app is valuable to a small business like the restaurant that I order my lunch.

1. The convenience of interacting with a small business from your mobile device is huge. I don't bring my laptop to the gym with me, so if I couldn't order lunch from my phone I likely wouldn't be ordering lunch from this restaurant.

2. While I love the food this restaurant offers, I find myself consistently going back to this restaurant because they have a mobile loyalty program and I get a free lunch out of them every couple weeks. I don't need to carry a punch card around or anything like that; I'm simply rewarded for consistently ordering lunch there. And because I go in so often, the staff has come to know me... which is nice. While there are plenty of other lunch options available to me, this definitely brings me in this particular restaurant's door more often.
3. Last but not least, my lunch is always ready for me when I arrive and it's always well made. At first blush this may not seem to have much to do with a mobile app, but from the restaurant's perspective it actually does. There's usually only two or three employees working at this place at any given time. By ordering via my mobile device, they receive all of my order details automatically without being tied up on the phone taking my order. That frees them up to spend more time making sure that my lunch is well prepared and ready by the time I swing through to pick it up.

This one, real world example from my own life is extremely illustrative of the value that small businesses can get out of a mobile app. And after talking to a whole bunch of Apps to small business customers, I've boiled my learnings down to two primary reasons that any small business owner should consider adding a mobile app to their marketing tool kit.

Mobile apps are a marketing tool that strengthen the relationship between small businesses and their best customers, increasing revenue from repeat business.

Point blank, this is the primary reason that a small business should consider a mobile app. This is very different than the value that a website provides to a small business, and very different from any of the other marketing tactics a small business might look

to employ. A mobile app provides a direct communication channel between a business and their customers.

You can use features like push notifications to directly and effectively communicate with your customers, informing them of specials, promotions, and other events relevant to your business. You can also leverage loyalty programs to keep customers coming back to your business. When your customers are in the know, incited to do business with you, and your business is literally in their pocket then your business truly has the opportunity to build stronger relationships with your best customers – and increase revenue from repeat business. It is very important to note that mobile apps are a marketing tool – just having an app is not going to do anything for your business. You must be dedicated to using the mobile app as a marketing tool if you wish to be successful.



The convenience that mobile affords drives business that would have otherwise been missed out on

Mobile apps allow small businesses to meet their customers, and transact with their customers, wherever they are. People are impulsive. People are busy. Mobile apps

allow small businesses to capitalize on consumers buying intent in the moments when that intent is strongest. For me, it was being able to pick up my lunch on my way back from the gym without needing to sit down at a laptop to place my order or walking into the business and waiting for them to make my order. For a spa, it might be allowing a customer to schedule their next massage as they ride the subway home from work. People get busy, people get distracted – would that massage have ended up on the spa's books if their customer hadn't been to make the reservation in their few spare minutes on the subway? Or maybe you're a band. What better way is there to increase your ticket sales than sending your new single directly to your fans' phones, along with a shopping cart filled with tickets to your next concert?

Mobile is convenient, no doubt about it. And as a small business owner, chances are your livelihood depends on developing deep, meaningful relationships with your best customers to keep them coming back for more. A mobile app is not a website, it's not direct mail campaign – it is a tool that your small business should consider if you're looking to better engage with our customers and grow your revenues.