

Marketers: What's "App" with Your Brand?

Angry Birds, Candy Crush, Words With Friends—if you've not played them, you've likely heard of them. These games had their beginnings as mobile apps but over time have built themselves into strong brands. *Angry Birds* even went on to expand into a multibillion-dollar franchise. And now, established brands are creating apps too. You might be surprised at how many there are; among the 2013 BrandZ™ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands, 89 brands have designed and launched an app, and some have produced more than one.



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Marketers recognize the app arena as an important place to be. But simply having an app presence is not enough. There's a need to understand the impact apps can have on a brand. In other words, if we think of apps as a new form of "creative," how do we ensure that an app makes a positive impression on its intended audience?

It is also important to understand that when working with apps, the rules of engagement have changed. Although the basic principle remains the same—brands want to interact with consumers where they are, and where they're spending their time—*how* this is approached with apps needs to be different.

ME, MY PHONE, AND I

The relationship we have developed with our phones is a unique and intimate one. Mobile has become a very personal space, of which we're extremely protective. And as smartphones become ever more capable, our reliance on this relationship grows. In a recent Millward Brown study,¹ which explored our interactions with mobile devices, one participant noted, "I take my smartphone everywhere. Life collapses if I forget it."

A bit extreme? Perhaps. But the fact is, year on year we are spending more time with our mobile devices and less time with TV, radio, and print. And in the future, this relationship is only going to strengthen. Many of us have seen children who are more adept at using an iPhone than their parents are, and babies who swipe at a TV screen wondering why it doesn't move. To the young (and increasingly restless), mobile is already second nature.

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It is because of this relationship that the rules of engagement for apps are different. Apps face challenges that other media do not, specifically getting "on device" and then staying "on device." A place on the home screen must be earned, and this is no mean feat considering brands are competing with the likes of angry birds and evil pigs. So how can brands increase the chances that their app will gain a long-term presence on people's phones?

¹ Millward Brown AdReaction Mobile Study, 2012.

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The answer is in providing true value to the consumer. This value could come in the form of entertainment, information, utility (i.e., providing the ability to perform a task efficiently), or a mix of all three.

AN ENTERTAINMENT-BASED APP

Chipotle's *Scarecrow* app is an arcade-style game that consists of four different worlds and 20 different levels; the goal of the game is to rescue the City of Plenty from the powerful industrial food corporation Crow Foods. The app uses familiar gamification tactics—points, status, badges, unlocking levels—to engage



players and encourage them to come back on a regular basis. And interestingly, one of the rewards the game unlocks is a buy-one, get-one-free offer that can be redeemed at a Chipotle restaurant.

Why we like it

The production values and gameplay on Chipotle's *Scarecrow* are simply fantastic; this app will do well alongside any similarly styled

mobile game. It conveys the brand's ideal—the promotion of sustainable agriculture—in a fun way. It also illustrates outside-the-box thinking. Chipotle could have created an app that allowed people to simply see the menu or order food, but instead they reinforced the brand's meaning through an engaging game. As part of a larger 360 marketing campaign, the app also demonstrates that mobile should be part of the marketing mix and not just an experimental side project.

AN INFORMATION-BASED APP

Coca-Cola's *Freestyle* app makes it easy for people to find and interact with the unique drink dispensers that Coke began rolling out across the United States in 2009. (More recently, the drink machines have been introduced in the UK, Canada, and Japan.) The app allows users to explore the different drink options, create a "favorites" list, and even create their own mixes. Location services not only highlight nearby machines but also flag special offers that might be available in the same vicinity. In certain locations, users can scan a QR code to interact with the dispenser and have their personal favorites and mixes automatically transferred from the app to the machine.

The app also offers periodic challenges, which, when completed, enter the user into a weekly sweepstakes to win cash prizes.

Why we like it

The premise is simple: explore and experiment with new drink flavors on the app and then find Freestyle dispensers to try them. It proves that a good app doesn't have to be complicated. Draped in Coke's classic red and white, the app is well branded and also easy and intuitive to use. The message Coke conveys via the app is twofold: they recognize that happiness comes

POINT OF VIEW

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in many different flavors, and since everybody has their own favorite, Coke will help them find it.

The app delivers value to Coke drinkers by providing information about the various drink flavors in a fun and engaging way and using location services to drive purchase in the real world. This helps get people out of the app and into the real world to continue their experience with the brand.

A UTILITY-BASED APP

Walmart's award-winning retail app provides value to consumers by helping them save time and money. In addition to allowing them to browse for products, the shopping list tool lets shoppers type, speak, or scan items onto a list while tracking and updating total costs. Once in-store, the app lets users learn the price of any additional items using the built-in scanner, then finds the items using aisle location. Relevant local store ads, events, and new items are also pushed out during the shopping experience.



Why we like it

The mobile app is not just a mini-version of the Walmart online site. The app has been designed to provide additional features only mobile can bring; for example, aisle location, bar code scanning, and bespoke ads based on store location. It's a smart, easy-to-use app that feels familiar to the user because of what it shares with the online site, yet it is different enough to keep shoppers coming back for its unique benefits. The app is well branded and, through the features it offers, succeeds in conveying Walmart's brand ideal of "save money, live better."

MEASURING APP EFFECTIVENESS

So how do we measure the success of apps from established brands?

One thing is for certain—we need to go beyond the number of downloads they receive or the type of audience they reach. While these metrics are important, they tell only half the story. The other half, which is absolutely critical, is the impact the app has on the brand. As mentioned earlier, if we think of an app as a piece of creative, we can draw on familiar advertising concepts to frame and understand its brand impact. For example:

- Is the app engaging? Does it draw users in and provide them with an enjoyable experience?
- Does the app leave users with a compelling impression that is linked to the brand?
- Does the app encourage users to continue using the brand or to take some specific action?



With apps, there are also new things to think about:

- What is the brand's role in the app?
- How does the app perform from a usability perspective? Is it intuitive? Can consumers find what they're looking for?
- How does the app perform from a technical perspective? Is it reliable? Does it do what users want it to do?

It is with the answers to these questions in mind, together with the number of downloads and audience statistics, that app effectiveness should be measured.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BRAND MANAGERS AND MARKETERS

Apps provide a new and exciting opportunity for brands to communicate with consumers. However, the promise of this new medium will be realized only by those who provide real value in their apps and implement them with sensitivity to the personal relationship people have with their mobile devices.

For long-term success, app development must not be a one-off production. Apps need

to be constantly refreshed to keep consumers interested and to continue to earn space on the home screen. Brands need to test, test, and retest to ensure that every version of their app is providing the best possible experience for consumers and making the best possible impact on their brand. The good news is that consumers are open to this. Many of us are accustomed to receiving app updates on our phones—the question we ask each time we see one is: Does this app still provide value to me?

As established brands continue to innovate in the app space, we will continue to observe successes and failures, winners and losers. We believe that a successful app can contribute to brand value, but only time will tell how significant this factor will be for different brands and categories. In the meantime, we are looking forward to seeing and evaluating the new and creative ways that brands explore and use apps as a means to reach and communicate with their consumers.

To read more about mobile apps and digital marketing, please visit www.mb-blog.com.

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