GetSynchronicity

Custom Apps: Powerful tools that drive customer engagement

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Q: I keep hearing about customized apps, but can they help me?

A: Today, more than ever, customized apps are helping companies across every vertical to super-charge their customer engagement and realize measurable results.

For those who may not know, an "app" … short for "application" … is a piece of software designed to run on a smartphone or mobile device such as the Android, iPhone, BlackBerry or iPad. Hence the popular modifiers "mobile app" or "iPhone app."

This definition, however, provides no hint as to their hidden potential, and how they can be **customized** to drive measurable results in your tradeshow & event programs.

> The name "customized app" gives no hint to their hidden potential.

A little history, 10 years or so ago, having an app customized for your company was a bit of a pipe dream. There were few reliable business-app developers available, and the cost of development was prohibitive. Today, the market has evolved dramatically. App developers are everywhere (caveat emptor!), which has made *customized* apps more affordable than ever. The best part is, they can help marketers solve large challenges and deliver tangible results.

The best way to explain how this may be done is to explore three specific examples where companies created a custom app … or a series of custom apps … to solve specific challenges. Each example illustrates not only *what* these apps accomplished, but also the *tangible results* they delivered.

DMG Mori Seiki. DMG Mori needed to improve their in-booth customer service at IMTS.

They had the largest booth on the show floor; two double decks, twenty meeting rooms, and a café that served three-hundred people. They also mobilized over four hundred staffers to work the IMTS exhibit.

When they exhibit, they EXHIBIT!

However, the magnitude of the exhibit and staff created a palpable challenge; how could they more effectively manage all of these human resources to create a better, more seamless in-booth customer experience … in a booth that's the size of Rhode Island?

Add to that the task of managing all of the *physical* resources in the booth, including meeting rooms. Did they need to invest in, and train, MORE and MORE staffing?

The solution, I'm sure you guessed, was a multi-platform, ***customized*** app. This app was designed to operate like a social media site to ensure it was immediately familiar to the users.

Prior to the event, all DMG Mori staffers were required to download the app onto their smartphones or tablets and register on it with their name, phone, email, etc. They were also required to enter all of their *scheduling* information into the app's built-in, interactive calendar, including *when* they were slated to work in the exhibit, *where* in the exhibit they would be working, the times they *blocked* for pre-existing appointments, their planned *off-site time*, etc. They needed to account for every minute of every hour the show was open. As the show approached, if their schedule changed, they were required to update the app.

The CUSTOMIZED app delivered a streamlined, one-stop-shop solution that solved ALL of this exhibit's complicated challenges

Additionally, all of the meeting rooms were registered in the app.

The show opened, and the masses started visiting the exhibit. However, this year, when an attendee walked into the exhibit and asked for rep Jane Smith, finding Jane and connecting her with the attendee was easy and clear; ANY booth staffer could quickly access the app on their smartphone, click on the rep's name, and check that rep's current schedule. If the rep was in the booth and free, the app could ping the rep to report to a specific place to meet with the attendee, or direct the attendee to a specific area of the exhibit. If the rep was NOT in the exhibit, or in a meeting, the attendee was informed of this, and other measures could be taken.

Furthermore, with a few taps, reps could find an open meeting room, or schedule one for the future. They could also find their fellow reps (they found this very useful!) The app also eliminated any confusion about who was working the booth at what time, and ensured that each area of the exhibit was fully staffed at all times.

Some readers may be thinking, *"But couldn't they simply access Google Calendar or Outlook to accomplish the same thing, along with a Google spreadsheet to check on the meeting rooms, and then they could use the company directory to find the rep's information, and then make a call and …"*

You see where this is headed? The CUSTOMIZED app delivered a streamlined, one-stop-shop solution that solved ALL of this exhibit's complicated challenges.

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Results. The overall customer experience ratings skyrocketed. The attendee experience was greatly improved; the exhibit staff was better able to focus on what was important … the customer. The human resource investment was also significantly reduced and their performance enhanced.

A single, customized app delivered off the charts ROI.

Electrolux. Electrolux exhibits at six major dealer shows where they generate a lot of business. To better engage their customers, they had implemented a "Learn and Earn" experience in the exhibit. This engagement included an hourly prize drawing in the booth. This may not sound too unwieldy, but as mentioned, these were major shows for Electrolux that generated a lot of traffic … hundreds and hundreds of attendees … all in their booth … wanting to enter the hourly drawings.

The situation:

- Reps spent an inordinate amount of time filling out entry forms.

- Attendees were literally stuffing the ballot box with dozens of duplicate entries.

- This caused single attendees to win multiple prizes throughout the day, causing hurt feelings and general distrust of the prize process.

- Locating winners was a challenge.

- Collecting the metrics these entry forms gathered was labor-intensive and needed to be entered into Electrolux CRM system by hand.

> Quite an accomplishment for a small piece of programming.

The solution? A custom app was designed to handle the entire "Learn & Earn" engagement & prize process.

- The app was pre-populated with the show attendee list.

- Professional Engagers, armed with smartphones, greeted attendees and asked, *"Have you registered for "Learn and Earn?"*

- A quick look-up found the attendee name, dealer name, etc.

- If the information was correct, the staffer hit "ENTER" and the attendee was entered into the drawings. DONE.

- If the information was not correct, the staffer corrected it and then hit "ENTER." CORRECTED and DONE.

- Every hour, when a winner needed to be drawn, the APP took care of it by choosing a winner at random. If the person was present, they were given their prize. Most often, however, they were not, so the app notified them to the exhibit to pick up their prize.

And most important, the app "locked" that attendee out from future prize drawings. Each attendee could only win once. This ensured that the contest was administered fairly.

Finally, the data gathered by the app was converted into a data file and was accurately uploaded into Electrolux's CRM system.

Results. This custom app streamlined the engagement process for the attendee, as well as for the client. Attendee surveys were uniformly positive, the staff was overjoyed, and an engagement program that had previously resulted in grumbles and hurt feelings now generated nothing but positive feedback.

Quite an accomplishment for a small piece of programming.

Johnson Controls (JCI). Major auto shows attract consumers by the tens of thousands, but in private rooms off the main show floor in cities like Detroit, Shanghai, or Frankfort, special rooms with focused exhibits cater to an extremely important segment of the auto industry … auto engineers. This is where JCI (Johnson Controls) needed to engage engineers, educate them about JCI's newest power deliver solutions (batteries) for vehicles, as well as gather valuable market research.

They accomplished this by creating three customized apps that drove a variety of engagements on a variety of video screens.

The first customized app powered a multi-screen interaction. First, attendees were directed to choose one of nine different battery types. This triggered two other screens in the array; the first displayed an automation that showed how this battery affected the distribution of energy through the automobile powertrain, and the second visually mapped the market adoption rates, regulatory implications, energy ratings and other critical factual information.

The second customized app was loaded onto nine iPads, which were then serially positioned under replicas of nine new types of batteries. Engineers could tap their way through the iPad to view cross-section illustrations of the new battery and see about detailed product specs for the each. The most important function of this app, however, was its polling capabilities.

Engineers were asked to vote on which next-generation feature(s) they would like to see added to future battery production. With one last tap, the engineers could see how their choices compared to those of their peers.

This app, then, powered an interactive & educational engagement, gathered valuable market research, and enabled immediate comparative market analysis.

Not bad for ONE customized app.

The third customized app enabled attendees to take an interactive journey through JCI's projected investment in future technologies and provided a process map for development and launch of new products.

Conclusion. These are only three ways companies are using customized apps to drive their customer engagements, educate attendees about their differentiators, and gather valuable up-to-the-second target-audience metrics.

The possibilities, of course, are endless:

> The CUSTOMIZED app delivered a streamlined, one-stop-shop solution that solved ALL of this exhibit's complicated challenges

- Want to leverage the power of social media in your exhibit via a Global Attendee Sharing Wall?

- Want to enable attendees at your event ... and around the globe ... to privately network and share ideas through the lens of your brand & solutions?

- Looking to engage your internal team at a Sales Meeting with highly focused, fun, and informative activities?

Customized apps are one of the leading drivers of new and interesting ways to engage target audiences, and the cost of entry is no longer limited by technical requirements or budget.

It's a buyer's market, and it's time Marketers started taking advantage of it.

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