

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mobile Internet technology has evolved and continues to evolve at a rapid rate - right now its popularity is at an all time high. Needless to say most businesses are keen to get on board.

Thanks to developments in third generation mobile technology (3G) the 'smart phone' is the ultimate 'convergence' device able to support fast broadband, transmission of voice, text, multimedia and video. Within the space of a few short years, smart phones have been rapidly adopted, with the devices now holding more than 60 per cent market share.

Australian consumers are increasingly engaging in a wider range of activities on their mobile phones, including accessing the Internet on the go. General browsing, accessing news, sport and weather updates, banking, downloading music and purchasing goods and services are among the most popular activities performed from a mobile phone.

In the palm of a consumer's hand they have the power to access anything, anywhere at the touch of screen or the press of a button. So why wouldn't a business see this as an opportunity to build its brand, communicate with customers and ultimately increase sales?

Mobile applications or 'apps' are all the rage right now; there are approximately 16.7 million app downloads per day. That is a staggering statistic, which holds great opportunity for businesses and raises the question – should your business have an app?

Well, not necessarily. The other player in the mobile marketplace that is also immensely popular, but seldom discussed in mainstream media, is the mobile-optimised website or 'mobile website'.

However there are many facets of mobile technology, and here begins the robust debate for businesses entering the mobile space - mobile app or mobile website? Which is more important or better for your business?

If you own a smart phone you are likely to be familiar with the benefits of both apps and mobile websites – including easy-to-access information and instant transactions to name a few.

A mobile app is a stand-alone downloadable software for mobile devices. Generally developed with the user experience in mind, they capitalise on the existing mobile phone device's features such as the inbuilt GPS or camera to offer an interactive experience and perform a specific task.

From a technical perspective this allows fast load times and the ability to tap into elements already installed within the mobile device to improve its functionality.

The downside is mobile apps are device specific and need to be downloaded and installed. Considering the number of platforms available - Android, Symbian, Maemo, BlackBerry, iPhone and Windows Mobile just to name a few – it is a fragmented and highly competitive space. Android alone has grown its share of the smart phone market by more than 600 per cent since entering the market, putting it ahead of Apple and BlackBerry.

Some would say mobile apps offer a richer user experience than mobile websites, simply because up until recently the mobile browsing experience was not very user-friendly. However, thanks to faster and better next generation mobile technology this no longer needs to be the case.

Essentially a mobile website offers similar functions to a normal website but on a smaller screen. Its primary purpose is to deliver accessible, user-friendly information via a mobile phone's Internet connection.

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Take for example Hamilton Holden, a car dealership Deadline worked with to create a mobile-optimised website. Based on consumer understanding it was determined that most people in the market for a used car do some preliminary research via the web then head out to visit dealers. The best fit was a mobile website that offered essential information, location, and feature details about the cars and the services available. As a value add for their existing customers there is also a "book a service" feature specifically optimised for mobile devices.

One benefit of mobile websites is that for the website owner it offers greater market reach than downloadable mobile apps. Put simply you create one mobile website, it can operate on any Internet capable mobile device via a browser and does not require software downloads.

Further to this mobile websites do not have to comply with the stringent and sometimes subjective guidelines enforced by the various App Stores (e.g. Apple, Google or Blackberry), which can see business left at the mercy of app distributors. Take for example Apple, who charge a 30 per cent fee for distribution through their iStore and impose compulsory policies built around Apple's commercial objectives rather than consumer demand. Android on the other hand employ a policy that considers the demands of the market.

Business must also consider the on-going implications of managing apps. Updates in distributor's operating systems can result in an app needing to be fine-tuned to comply, which obviously comes at a cost.

Consumers are demanding a more sophisticated brand experience, optimised for mobile devices. Research has indicated that within five years more people will be using the Internet through their mobile devices than a PC - it's a huge market.

So clearly both have their pros and cons. The key to determining the right fit for your business lies with your consumers. The first step is to ask your customers what they will use. Do they want to perform a specific task or just access information? What will make dealing with you via their mobile easier and/or better for them? Consulting with your customers to determine what their preferences are is really just Marketing 101!

So the obvious question, what is the financial outlay? This depends on what you determine your customers' needs to be. Whether it be an app or a mobile website, the cost of development varies greatly and you generally get what you pay for. For example, if you are in the market for a very basic mobile website with limited interactivity, there are a number of DIY tools available.

However, if you want to offer your consumers a professional, interactive, multifunctional sophisticated mobile experience that demonstrates you are serious about servicing their needs then you are best to engage a professional, such as Deadline.

So the outlay doesn't have to be huge but you need to get it right to cater for your customer's needs. The key is, know your customer base. If they are mobile, is it time your business is as well?

ABOUT DEADLINE

Deadline was established in 1996 and is one of South Australia's leading online software development companies. Creating custom online business solutions, Deadline helps its clients do business online and create their own unique online space. For more information visit www.deadline.net.au

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