

INSIGHT ON TECHNOLOGY

BUILDING A MOBILE PRESENCE



Today, almost every company with a Web presence is thinking about or developing mobile applications and a mobile Web site. Customers expect, and even demand, to be able to use a mobile device of their choice to obtain information or perform a transaction anywhere and at any time. So, if a company wants to stay connected to its customers, it needs a mobile presence.

Developing mobile apps or a mobile Web site has some special challenges. The user experience on a mobile device is fundamentally different from that on a desktop computer. There are special features on mobile devices such as location-based services that give a company the potential to interact with customers in new ways. Businesses need to be able to take advantage of those features while delivering an experience that is appropriate to a small screen. You can't just port a Web site or desktop application to a smartphone or tablet. There are multiple mobile platforms to work with—iPhone, Android, BlackBerry, and Windows—and a company may need a different version of an application to run on each of these. Increasingly, mobile-optimized Web sites are “responsive,” which means they adapt their displays based on the screen resolution of the mobile device used to view the site. Some mobile sites have tweaks to their layout that factor in the smartphone browsing experience, such as placing company contact information at the top of the screen on every page instead of at the bottom of only certain pages.

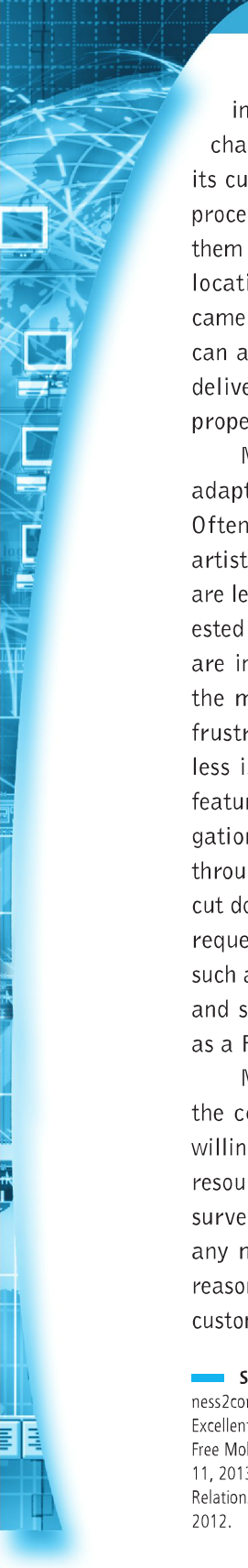
It's important to understand how, why, and where customers use mobile devices and how these mobile experiences change business interactions and behavior. For example, do customers who

use an app conduct a greater number of transactions (like purchasing) on apps when compared to a mobile browser? When compared to a tablet computer, do customers spend more or less time researching products and shopping from a smartphone?

Local businesses may stand to significantly gain from the shift to mobile. Approximately half of all mobile searches are done in search of a nearby business. The total number of local business searches performed on mobile phones has been growing explosively, along with nearly every other statistic related to mobile devices or mobile apps. Over 50% of the U.S. population has a smartphone and almost as many (46%) own a tablet.

The number of small businesses with Web sites optimized for mobile navigation is trailing behind those numbers. Only about 15% of small businesses have mobile Web sites with responsive design, and approximately half of all businesses lack a mobile site or app entirely. These numbers are expected to rise over time as the businesses that optimize their sites first reap the benefits, such as increased traffic and better standing in Google searches and other search engines. A 2013 report by Adobe showed that companies investing in mobile-optimized sites are three times more likely to achieve mobile conversion rates of 5% or higher than companies relying exclusively on traditional desktop Web sites. During the original dot-com boom, companies that were quick to adjust to the new online business environment gained an edge on their competitors. The same thing is happening with the mobile platform today.

Before entering the mobile sphere, companies should develop a clear strategy and goals they hope to accomplish. A mobile strategy involves



more than selecting mobile devices, operating systems, and applications. It also involves changes to the way a business interacts with its customers. Mobile technology can streamline processes, make them more portable, and enhance them with capabilities such as touch interfaces, location and mapping features, alerts, texting, cameras, and video functionality. The technology can also create less efficient processes or fail to deliver benefits if the mobile application is not properly designed.

Many small businesses have struggled to adapt to the changes of designing for mobile. Often, businesses design their Web sites with artistic considerations in mind, but mobile users are less interested in presentation and more interested in functionality. Sites with Flash elements are incompatible with the iPhone, which makes the mobile browsing experience incomplete or frustrating for the user. Many times with mobile, less is more when it comes to design. Common features of today's mobile Web sites are a navigation bar at the top of each page that persists throughout browsing, collapsible sets of data that cut down on screen space unless users specifically request to see the complete set of information, such as a restaurant menu or full mailing address, and simple, easy-to-read icons and buttons such as a Facebook "like" button.

Many businesses are still getting used to the costs of maintaining a Web site and aren't willing to redo that work and spend more time and resources to incorporate responsive design. In one survey of small businesses, businesses not using any mobile solutions said that the two biggest reasons for staying away from mobile were lack of customer demand and lack of ability to deploy and

use them. But the total number of businesses that say they have no intention of entering the mobile arena is going down precipitously. In the same survey, only 8% of businesses reported no plans to have a mobile-optimized Web site. That number was down from 28% of businesses in 2013.

There are a number of Web site design companies that offer templates that can automatically convert Web sites into mobile-only versions of the same site. For example, you can create a desktop Web site using a template provided by Wix, and it will automatically create a mobile version of the site. A Mobile Editor enables you to change the design of the mobile site without affecting the desktop version of the site, giving businesses more creative freedom. Mofuse is another company that offers an easy-to-use mobile Web site creator. For those who are challenged by even that prospect, Mofuse will create the site for you. Developing mobile apps is probably a bit more daunting for the average small business, but there are number of platforms that can help you build a mobile app on a budget without any programming knowledge. For example BiznessApps enables you to use a drag-and-drop template to quickly and easily build iPhone, iPad, Android, and HTML5 apps that include functionality such as dynamic content, one-touch calling, push notifications, built-in sharing capabilities, a shopping cart, loyalty program, in-app purchases, and much more. It also offers templates optimized for various industries, such as restaurants, bars and clubs, realtors, lawyers, gyms and fitness centers, and spas and salons. A content management system allows the apps to be easily customized and updated. More than 100,000 small businesses around the world have used BiznessApps.

SOURCES: "Overview," Biznessapps.com, August 22, 2014; "Mobile Madness: Small Business Mobile Adoption on the Rise," by Jason Fidler, Business2community.com, July 30, 2014; "Making Sure Your Website is Ready for Smartphones," by Eilene Zimmerman, *New York Times*, January 8, 2014; "10 Excellent Platforms for Building Mobile Apps," by Grace Smith, Mashable.com, December 3, 2013; "New Mobile Solution from Wix – Better, Faster and 100% Free Mobile Websites," Wix.com, October 2, 2013; "4 Examples of Stellar Small Business Mobile Websites," by Sebastian Agosta, Experiencedmg.com, April 11, 2013; "45% of Businesses Still Don't Have a Mobile Site or App," by David Moth, Econsultancy.com, May 2, 2013; "Mobility Transforms the Customer Relationship," by Samuel Greengard, Baseline, February 2012; "Going Mobile: A Portable Approach to Process Improvement," *Business Agility Insights*, June 2012.

The most expensive path to a mobile presence is to build a native app. Native apps can require more extensive programming expertise. In addition, virtually none of the elements used in your existing Web site can be reused, and you will need to redesign the entire logic of the interface and carefully think out the customer experience. For instance, there is a fairly stable HTML traditional Web site interface with buttons, graphics, videos, and ads that has developed over the last decade. This is not true for apps. There is no set of standards or expectations even on the part of users—every app looks different from every other app. This means the user confronts large variations in app design, so your interface must be quite simple and obvious. Many of the bells and whistles found on the large desktop Web site screen cannot be used in mobile apps. You'll need even greater simplification and focus. These weaknesses are also native apps' greatest strength: you have the opportunity to create a really stunning, unique customer experience where users can interact with your brand. If you want an intense branding experience with your customers, where interaction between your brand and customers is effortless and efficient, then native apps are the best choice.