

Toy or Tool? There's an App for That!

Do you need a mobile app for your business?

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What is it? An app (once known as an application, before everything seemed to get pithier in the English language) is used most often these days to describe software developed specifically for a mobile device (phone or tablet). In theory, its purpose is to simplify one's life or business or make information more easily accessible and portable. A native app is written in code for each specific platform such as iOS, Android and Windows. A cross-platform app can be written using HTML 5, CSS, Java or a combination of these so it can be used across operating platforms.

What's the value? It's a fact: People are relying more on phones and tablets than ever before. By the end of the 2013, more mobile devices than people will exist on earth. [Check out this infographic](#) for more mobile statistics. According to app developer [Worry Free Labs](#), a company that has created apps such as KeyMe and a learning app for Disney, "Consumers are increasingly using mobile devices to find businesses and shop online, and a mobile app could be a better way to bring in customers than a traditional website. Also, companies can use mobile apps to engage customers outside of purchasing goods. Smart retailers use apps to create loyalty programs that get customers in the door, but also let the business track users' behaviors, such as how often they're purchasing which goods. A company can also use mobile apps for internal purposes such as increasing employee productivity and providing its sales force with access to realtime information about products, inventory, and customers."

What's the downside? Some companies jump into developing a "custom app" just because they believe it will make them appear more innovative. As with any customer or business technology, be sure you have a clearly articulated objective and measurement system developed prior to investing. App developers range from solo freelancers to full-service agencies. You'll want to hire a developer who not only understands your objectives but also has some insight into customer/user behavior and has a process for user testing.

The bottom line: Think before you develop an appetite! An app that's cool but not functional or useful only benefits the developer!

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