

Are Mobile Show Guides the Way of the Future?

By Barry Siskind

Trade show exhibitors are quickly moving away from having excessive amounts of hard-copy brochures, price sheets, and catalogues, so it's no wonder that the paper-based show guide should also be placed on the endangered list.

Technology has made it possible to bring trade show exhibiting one step closer to being environmentally friendly by switching from paper to electronics. It is now possible to put the entire show guide on one user-friendly app.

Companies like Mobi, Guidebook, and TapWalk have taken the lead in producing the first generation of apps that hold the promise of greatly improving the efficiency of exhibitor's performance.

What these apps do, in a nutshell, is not simply replace the hard copy show guide but also create an interactive show environment. The way it works is that the show manager will contract with a Mobile App service company and then offer exhibitors the opportunity of participating either by having a basic listing or through more sophisticated sponsorship offerings.

Then, the show manager will promote the app to its attendees describing the benefits and the procedure for downloading. Some of the benefits to attendees include: the site map, listing of exhibitors, conference schedule, social media browsing, interactive sponsorships, links to exhibitors and product information, to-do lists, a place to share show photographs, interactivity with other attendees, and more, depending on the vendor that is providing the app.

According to Dave Owens, CEO of TapWalk, the real value of a mobile show guide app to exhibitors is access to analytics. If exhibitors can know how many people clicked onto their show site, who these attendees visited, and their unique traffic patterns at the show, this technology opens the door to a new level of sophistication to calculate Return on Investment or Return on Objectives.

For those exhibitors whose exhibiting objectives are to make a sale or gather quality leads for future follow-up, they now have access to the names of people who took the time to open their show link. It tells this exhibitor which of their competitors the visitor has seen and how long they spent on competitors' pages. For those exhibitors who are interested in developing awareness of their brand or to create a presence, sponsoring the app becomes a method of ensuring that their name is top of mind. In addition, exhibitors have access to such information as the sequence of booths the attendee has visited and the search terms they used.

The real question is, "do they work?" According to a study of the use of the mobile show guide app used at the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada (PDAC) trade show, which attracted 30,000 attendees from 125 countries, the use of their mobile app has grown.^{1[1]} Here is what they reported after their 2013 convention:

^{1[1]} PDAC.ca

Years Compared	2012	2013
Visits to site	10,030	20,904
Pages viewed	5,327	154,404
Pages viewed per site	6.71	7.39
Average time spent at site	4 min, 36 sec.	6 min. 42 sec.
Average time spent on each page	48 seconds	52 seconds

This study suggests that attendees are becoming more comfortable with mobile apps and relying on them more for up-to-date show information.

When an exhibitor is faced with a decision of whether or not to participate in the show app, Dave Owens suggests they ask the show manager a few pointed questions such as:

- Is the app customized to the show, or is it generic?
- How will attendees be able to upload the app?
- When will the app be available to the attendee?
- How will show management promote and market the use of the app?
- What types of analytics will be available to exhibitors?
- What is the level of confidentiality of data collected?
- What are the costs and benefits of the particular app that show management has chosen for their show?

Mobile show guide apps provide access to “Big Data,” on a very specific situational basis. The possibilities are endless when exhibitors understand how to mine this data. What we are seeing in the marketplace now may only be scratching the surface of what is yet to come, but for those exhibitors looking to find the real value for their investment, this holds the promise of being a worthwhile tool.

Barry Siskind, President and Founder of [ITMC](#), is a trade show consultant, trainer, speaker, and an internationally recognized expert in trade and consumer shows. Each year, he addresses numerous conferences and association meetings around the globe. Over the past twenty-five years, Barry has traveled throughout the world working with thousands of public and private sector clients in virtually all industry groups. He creates, facilitates and delivers a wide range of services to companies involved in exhibit marketing. Barry is also a best-selling author of trade show business books: *The Successful Exhibitor*, *The Power of Exhibit Marketing*, *Making Contact*, *Bumblebees Can't Fly*, *Eagles Must Soar*, and his latest book *Powerful Exhibit Marketing*.