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Would a mobile app help your business?

By Geoff Mutton

With almost everyone, of every age, now permanently attached to a mobile screen of some kind, businesses that depend on communication with existing and potential customers need to know how to exploit this hi-tech age and how to be seen on these screens.

According to the 2018 Technology, Media and Telecommunications Predictions from Deloitte, the average person picks up their smartphone 55 times every day. As a result, there has been an explosion in the growth of mobile apps.

So what does a mobile app do, exactly. It is a type of application software designed to run on a mobile device, such as a smartphone or a tablet. The software provides users with services that used to run only on a personal computer. Mobile apps have become so desirable because they allow consumers to handpick what their devices are able to do.

From e-commerce stores and banks to food delivery and healthcare, there are few industries where mobile applications haven't proved their marketing value or become fundamental for effective communication with target customers.

Uptake of mobile apps in the automotive repair industry hasn't been as fast as in other sectors. But like everything else, apps cost money, so workshop owners and managers need to determine if such an investment will help them stay ahead of the competition.

To help you decide, here are some app benefits.

- **Direct communication** - Apps enable push notifications which are simply small automated messages that can reach people anywhere, anytime, regardless of whether their app is open. They receive the message whenever new content is uploaded. This kind of communication is proving to be more effective in engaging customer interest than traditional communication methods such as SMS, email and ordinary mail. Traditional customer communications such as service reminders, booking reminders, promotional offers or general business updates can very easily be sent via push notifications direct to the customers app.
- **Brand recognition** - Advertising on a variety of platforms has become so invasive that it is difficult to get your business to stand out. Print ads, sponsorships, online marketing, social media marketing – every other business is doing it. However, those industries that have combined their advertising output with an app, have reported far greater engagement with customers.
- **Customer loyalty** - Building customer loyalty is a critical and tricky aspect of marketing a business. Business apps help smooth this road by developing a connection between the customer and the workshop. Continually seeing your workshop logo on their phone increases awareness about the workshop and encourages customer loyalty.
- **Customer frequency** - According to surveys, most searches are made on-the-go while traveling, socialising and waiting for appointments rather than during leisure time where one has access to the laptop or desktop system. As apps are quicker and easier to navigate compared to websites, the ability to book a service or repair online via an app will make customers more likely to react to your reminders.
- **Customer engagement** - While business-to-customer communication is important for marketing, reverse communication is equally important to maintain customer loyalty. Customers love it when their concerns and complaints are treated seriously and resolved with minimal lag time. This, in turn, helps businesses build brand loyalty. This is where apps come into the picture. They help to maintain this critical relationship through the online help desk and support systems.
- **Stand out from the crowd** - The ability of an app to get your business to stand out from your competitors cannot be emphasised enough. Apps are certainly growing, but right now are a bit rare in the auto aftermarket. Jumping in early and developing one for your business may give you an advantage to attract potential new customers.

Once convinced that an app might benefit your business, there are a couple of options.

You could build your own with the help of your web designer. Some web designers can also build apps, or if not, they should be able to point you in the direction of someone who specialises in apps. Be warned, however, that building an app from scratch can be an expensive exercise.

An easier option is the VV garage app that was launched in Australia in early 2019. Feedback from early adopters has been outstanding. This is a fully customisable app that has been specifically built for aftermarket workshops.

Its features:

- Can be fully branded with your logo, colours and business details
- Has a unique download link that can be sent to your database
- Can send unlimited notifications direct to your customer's smartphones – special offers, service reminders, promotions, holiday opening times and seasonal motoring tips
- Can send live status updates on the day of a service, reassuring customers that their car is receiving your full attention and will be ready for collection at the agreed time
- Customers can use the app to respond to service reminders, book an appointment or sign-up to promotions
- Customers can access a warning light library that ultimately leads them back to your workshop
- An 'Ask my mechanic' function that efficiently puts your customer in contact with your workshop
- Can be integrated with Sam Software, Workshop Software, and very soon MechanicDesk, further increasing its functionality.

For more information on the app go to www.serviceprograms.com.au

Everyone is working extra hard these days to build customer loyalty and frequency. Our research shows that a customised workshop app will improve your chances to stay ahead of the competition.

The place to start is www.tatbiz.net.au/capricorn

Just go for it!