



What are the benefits of mobile B2B applications and can one help your business?

In this article, we're going to talk about why B2B apps are an important part of the way that companies run in this day and age, as well as tips and tricks to designing a great one. Then, we will finish with what looks to be on the horizon in the world of B2B mobile apps. After reading this you will understand the basics of what to do to get a great B2B mobile app.

The Value of Mobile Apps to Business

Business apps are created for use internally within a company, for a business's customers, or for customers of their customers. In contrast to B2C apps, which are placed in the marketplace on iOS or Android and sold to the masses, B2B apps are sold privately to businesses to be utilised within their workforce. In start-ups, it is often the CEO making the decision to implement a mobile app, while in small to medium-sized enterprises, it is often the CIO or CTO.

When looking internally at your business's communication, operations and productivity, do you see any room for improvement? Are there areas which are not as optimised as they could be, or places where your employees find difficult points? Identifying these factors is the starting ground for identifying how a B2B app can benefit your business.

Some businesses, however, still hold the opinion that developing apps should always be aimed at consumers, and that apps intended to help the business run are not worth the time or effort to develop. This is far from the truth, so let's take a closer look at how B2B mobile apps can bring value to your business.

Improved Communication

First, we see mobile B2B apps immensely helping companies improve their communications. The majority of companies use an email system to communicate, in which strings of emails go back and forth. However an app takes messaging a step further. Applications don't only allow for traditional messages to be sent in a chronological order, but they can open up new realms of collaboration. They can be specifically designed to allow for working on projects in groups, communicating regularly with set groups of people, sending push notifications and using the native abilities of smart phones for a variety of purposes.

Smart phones come equipped with many functions such as a camera and GPS; just to name a few. Now imagine an employee scans a document which needs to be reviewed by a certain group, uploads it instantly into an app and shares it with the needed people. The group collaborates instantly, approves it, and the original employee can move forward. Another scenario is a company which has a fleet of drivers. A mobile app can be used to improve their communication by using the GPS in each phone as a tracking system. This can be implemented to provide transparency on deliveries, resulting in more timely deliveries and satisfied customers. Additionally, companies can view routes and analyse driver times, to look for opportunities for cutting costs. These are just two examples of the multi-point collaboration capabilities that apps can provide.

As our world becomes increasingly globalised, businesses have to take large strides in order to stay in touch with all the people they're employing and contacting. It's now possible to fly halfway across the world in a jet and then start a video conversation with someone back where you started all in the same day – it's that kind of vast distance that mobile technology and business focused apps can transcend.

Improved Productivity

As you may have guessed, the enhanced communication leads to real improvements in productivity. The line of communication is immediate and is already focused on the exact task that it needs to be. The natural result of this is improved productivity for employees, who can access business contacts and important information much quicker. The internal processes within businesses can be streamlined and optimised. Additionally, apps can make workloads easier to handle and give employees a much clearer idea of project goals, resources and budgetary topics.

Now that we understand the core benefits, let's look at what you can do to make a great app.

Tips and Tricks for a Great B2B App

There are, unsurprisingly, a lot of considerations that go into a great B2B app. In this section, we're going to run through some of the most important pieces. These are elements that you'll want to design for if you're planning on designing it yourself, or those that you're going to want to communicate to whoever is designing your app for you as goals for the finished product.

- Identify the Problems

The key to having a worthwhile B2B app, is creating one to solve your company's specific problems. Don't make one because you think you need to in order to stay competitive. Study your businesses processes and identify which areas can be improved by the app. With clearly defined goals which will address the problem, and show probability of achieving the desired outcome, the app design can continue on a purposeful path. A great starting point is an employee survey which asks in which areas management could improve their job.

- Choose the Hardware

It is important to decide what types of devices you are going to permit within your company when planning the development of an app. Some companies opt for a "bring your own device" model, while others provide specific requirements for the type of equipment allowed. Certain devices may need to be designed on specific platforms; such as Apple's iOS platform for their iPads and iPhones.

- Plan the Content Management

Content within the app will need to evolve and change as the company does, so it is helpful to have an easy-to-use administrative panel which functions as a central resource for managing the app. Then updates can be made, or advised to your web developer.

- Optimise Availability

Another important topic here is work flow availability. Although apps have gotten a lot more powerful in the past couple of years, they still have certain constraints that go along with them, and especially when it comes to Internet connections and data processing capacity. Imagine that your employees are travelling in an area with a slower Internet speed than usual. They still need to be able to use the app seamlessly in that environment, or productivity will be stifled. When you're designing an app, make sure to think carefully about how often the app is going to need to connect to its home server and how much time it will take for it to synchronise the information it needs. The worst thing you can do is develop an app that people don't want or don't like to use. It is important to compress the data and design with performance in mind.

- Usability

It's also important to note here that designing with the same kind of sensibility as a customer-aimed app won't serve you well. Your employees will know their jobs – it's the app's job to facilitate your employees doing their jobs. Aiming for an intuitive interface that works on the same basic logic of the normal process of your employee's job is the ideal situation for a B2B app. It is helpful to hire a UX tester to ensure each function within the app is straight-forward, simple and works.

- Security

As a practical consideration, security is another important topic in designing a B2B app. Since the app will be responsible for handling a lot of sensitive information including names and contact information for employees, business and customer contacts, account and routing information, and trade secrets, it's really important that you take every necessary security measure to protect all that information. It's a good idea to make sure that you or whoever designs the app develops encryption procedures and other security methods. Ensuring that your customer's data is safe is of the up most importance and must be part of the development process, in order to guarantee true sustainability of the app.

- Smooth Work flow

As we mentioned earlier, work flow is an important part of these types of apps which must be a focus for your developers. Smoothing that work flow goes beyond the basic foundation for the app— it has to be a design goal that's carried through from one end of production to the other. This might mean collecting feedback from your employees during the design phase of the project, to get a sense of how they understand that their jobs work, and how it can be improved by the introduction of a new app. Then this information should be given to your app developers. To go along with this topic, make sure developers know that the user interface and design functionality must be easy to use, but also conducive to the kind of productivity that you'll want from your employees.

- Support

It is crucial that your app has channels of support when things are not working. If the workforce is supposed to use the app, and it does not work, a system needs to be in place to respond to any problems and take action to fix them quickly. It is recommended to have customer service contact information, phone support and a quick turn around on special requests. Plan for the best, and prepare for the worst.

- Deployment

Once the app is planned, developed and ready for the employees, there needs to be a plan for deploying the app onto the employee's devices. For most internal apps, companies will create a download area that is private, which allow the company to securely deploy the app to specific people.

With these tips and tricks in mind, you will be on the right path to creating a B2B application which your employees will appreciate and use. As a result, you can improve the communication and productivity which is possible for your business.

What's next?

It's important to remember that, once an app has been distributed, it's far from finished. Apps have a life cycle, much like distributions of other programs do. While an app is in use, you'll have to stay on top of any updates, which will handle any changes in content or business procedure. You'll also have to

monitor analytics. These are programs that assess the raw data from the app's use, and gather important information about how effective the app is, how and when people use it, and what people say about it.

Analytics create an important opportunity to gather information about how the app could be updated or changed to function better in future updates. It is also important to get the feedback of your employees actually using the app. If your employees do not see the tool as useful, the ability for it to help your business is drastically reduced. Ask for feedback, take it to the drawing board, and continue to fine tune your app to benefit your company.

In review, B2B apps are becoming more and more popular, and have shown great potential. They have the ability to help your business improve its internal work processes, keep internal employees connected, and open up new avenues of collaboration to improve productivity. With the majority of individuals keeping smart phones packed full of features on them 24 hours per day, your business can take full advantage of the technology by creating a B2B app.

The tips and tricks outlined above can be a guideline as you begin to plan what elements your app should include. Use these as a road map to begin your plan. Also keep in mind the ongoing research and maintenance an app will need to reach its full potential. In doing so, you can enjoy the benefits mobile B2B applications are bringing to businesses around the world. Not only that, you can ensure your business does not get left behind.