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### Creative Ways Mobile Apps Enhance the Customer Experience

Mobile apps aren't just about fun or functionality. Some organizations are using apps to help improve the customer experience. This is no surprise considering the opportunity presented by the growth in mobile usage.

A September 2010 study from the [Pew Internet Project](#) estimates that 82 percent of U.S. adults are mobile phone users, 32 percent have downloaded mobile applications, and 24 percent actively use them. This number is expected to steadily grow as prices drop, word-of-mouth spreads, and choice of device and provider increases.

According to Kerry Bodine, vice president and principal analyst at Forrester Research, [the opportunity](#) lies in extending a brand via mobile to deliver value within the context of customers' lives. Here

we look at how organizations in three distinct industries have tapped mobile apps to do just that—and as a result, interacting with customers in a way that enhance the customer experience.

#### Arlington, Texas, offers city services on-the-go

Government entities are not commonly thought of as early adopters of technology. Which is what makes the city of [Arlington, TX](#), stand out with its mobile strategy. The home of the Dallas Cowboys, the Texas Rangers, and this year's SuperBowl, the city wanted to provide access to government information, tourism services, and other helpful tools to both residents and visitors. "Imagination can run with vision and ideas," says Trey Yelverton, deputy city manager. "We want to make our connection with the public simpler and better."

The app launched in January 2011, just ahead of SuperBowl XLV, with the help of [MacroView Labs](#). Visitors can look up maps of nearby shopping, dining, and attractions, as well as local weather and ordinance information. Residents can pay city tax bills online, report pothole or street-light repairs, and receive public safety alerts.

The app received 6,000 downloads in its first month after an awareness campaign in mass media outlets. Yelverton says calls to the Mayor's office and convention bureau are down, because people can find answers themselves. "We always want to create opportunities to connect in a way that's relevant to folks. We want people to interact with us when they see something in the community," he says. "[The app] gives us instant ability to connect at the right spot so we can be more responsive to our residents."

Next steps include continuing to demonstrate the app's usefulness and build more awareness for residents. "To continue interest, we need to create some things that drive people to use the app," Yelverton says. There are also opportunities to partner with local businesses to develop processes on how to get them to have a mobile presence and develop potential revenue opportunities, adds Louis Carr, IT director.

Both agree that a solid strategy is necessary before launching any app. "You have to have a vision of what you want it to be before you get started," says Carr.

#### Not Your Average Joe's brings apps to the app-less

Who says you need a smartphone to use a mobile app? Restaurant chain [Not Your Average Joe's](#) has a history of outstanding service and wanted to extend that to the virtual world. "Our claim to fame is hospitality and customer service," says Steve Silverstein, CEO. Managers visit every table to chat with customers, and the company had used mystery shoppers to monitor performance and quality.

Silverstein wanted to collect data more formally from more customers. Mobile was an obvious choice. He realized, however, that not all customers would download a mobile app if offered. And mobile app penetration is still fairly small. So the company decided to bring the app to customers.

Working with [Survey on the Spot](#), in late 2010 the restaurant chain began offering each group of customers the chance to fill out a mobile survey on an iPod Touch brought to their table by the servers. The goal is to survey customers about their experience and encourage them to join the restaurant's email club. "We've gone from one survey a month to 20,000 per month," Silverstein says. In addition, about one third of respondents register for the email program. He says the allure of the device at the table increases customers' likelihood to take the survey. "It's fun to play with, it's cool technology, and it's easy."

In the 10-question survey customers are asked to rate their server, the food, the ambience, their likelihood to recommend, their speed of service, and the overall experience. There is also an option for open-ended comments, which are texted directly to the manager. The questions can be customized in real time. "We go from a static mystery shop form to real-time data points," Silverstein says. The data is compiled into a "Guest Acceptance Score" that is correlated with the restaurant's Net Promoter Scores to determine which locations need improvement and which are doing well. A dashboard shows weekly location comparisons. "We are able to change behavior because we're getting 500 surveys per week per store," which Silverstein ties directly to the popularity of the mobile survey.

### **Akbank's App Dash**

[Akbank](#) aims to be a technological pioneer in its banking environment. As the first bank in Turkey to authorize loans via SMS, Akbank is also striving to become the first to offer a range of banking apps designed for the iPad.

Launched early last year, Akbank's initial banking app allows customers to make credit card transactions, exchange stocks, invest funds, make credit card payments, etc.—all from interfaces designed for touch screen devices. "We had a vision. We said that wherever our customers are, we will be with them," says Galip Tozge, executive vice president for consumer banking at Akbank.

The bank still plans on communicating with customers via traditional channels like branches and ATMs; Tozge says that Akbank doesn't view mobile apps as competing with those mediums—but rather complementing them. "Every customer has their own favorite channel," he says.

With more than half of Turkish citizens owning a mobile phone and with that percentage buying new devices about every 10 months on average, Tozge says the goal is to keep up with the customers' ever-changing mobile demands, as well as to simplify their lives.

Since deploying the initial banking app, Akbank has launched additional ones with this aim in mind. "iPad Wing," for example, is an app for Akbank customers enrolled in the company's loyalty mileage program. Members can get a range of travel information like directions, shopping, dining, and weather conditions. The Akbank Loan app is a tool that performs loan calculations. For instance, it can calculate interest rates on 10-year mortgages. The Akbank Investor app offers information like exchange rates and stock market tips; "Don't Panic" is an insurance app that offers customers step-by-step guidance if, and when, they get into an automobile accident; and Akbank Sanat (i.e., art), lists all art events that Akbank is associated with (the bank is one of the key contributors to the Turkish arts community).

Tozge says that the company will continue to introduce apps in the future in an effort to meet its customers' evolving needs and to raise awareness with non-customers. He says, "You may not be an existing Akbank customer, but I know that if you use 'Don't Panic,' or the art app, you will feel positive about the brand."






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