App Design & Build

ICN Media Fact Sheet

Market analysis

The mobile market for apps has been growing exponentially since the birth of the iPhone-led tech revolution. When the first iPhone was released back in 2007, Steve Jobs described it in no small part as a ""breakthrough Internet communications device". That's exactly what smartphones have done - put the internet in everyone's pocket. In a similar fashion, the App Store has completely altered the way that software is created and distributed. The need for businesses to have a mobile strategy has always been there, but there's firm evidence too proving that mobile-only internet users have overtaken desktop-only users globally, and that mobile users are now spending 87% of their time in apps, versus just 13 percent on the web.

App design and implementation have always been a particular ICN speciality. Under the dedicated app branch of ICN: ICN Apps, we have been one of the leading app developers throughout the UK market and internationally, designing and building apps since the beginning of the decade; the second year that the App Store existed. ICN has also partnered with Nottingham's two universities to provide a production line of highly skilled digital media expertise; we were nominated for two national awards for our work with the University of Nottingham. Over the last 9 years, ICN Media has built nearly 20 apps for our clients, featuring around 40 hours of shot, edited and post-produced high quality HD video, all with household names across the UK, US, India and China. Simply put, we know firsthand what makes an app a success.

However. just because we have years of experience and expertise behind us doesn't mean that we charge exorbitant prices. We strive to find the ideal app solution to suit your budget, and if your goal unfortunately isn't achievable within the proposed budget, we'll be upfront and honest about it. We want to provide you with the highest possible quality service, not string you along to get money out of you.

Sure, it's possible to optimise a website for a mobile device but having a specific mobile app for your brand or business offers a myriad of benefits that a website simply can't provide. Apps are also driving the entire global advertising market, with figures hovering around $20bn-$25bn a year in terms of the growth that mobile advertising is fuelling for the entire global advertising industry, meanwhile mobile browsing advertising has been stagnant or slightly declining. In fact, one App Annie report predicts that by 2020, the gross income revenue of the mobile app industry will be worth $189bn. From a user perspective, 80% of time spent on the internet on a mobile device is actually spent in-app vs 20% of time which is spent with the user on a mobile browser. **The time for investing in apps is now.**

Why is having a Mobile App so important?

Your app will be a key resource when it comes to maintaining good relationships with your customers, providing the convenience of access to on-demand information & solutions. Your app can support your business's branding and message with any logos, brand colours, brand messaging, and brand imagery used for print, in addition to pulling content, data, image, and video from the internet. When searching for your app on the App Store, you want your app to both stand out to attract new users, and be recognisable to any existing customers. Additionally, once downloaded from the App Store or Google Play Store, an app is installed on the chosen device and means that any content on the app can be downloaded too and then accessed without an internet connection. This offers a significant benefit and edge over a merely mobile-optimised web page.

Apps have, without a doubt, become the preferred option for users when utilising their mobile device. When it comes to breaking down usage stats, we are seeing users spend much more time in-app vs on mobile browser, with percentages ranging from 82%-91% of the total time spent on mobile being 'in-App' across the globe. In the UK specifically, this percentage is 82%. Users are citing faster, more tailored user experiences as well as push notifications for being the reasoning behind why they are now using brand-specific apps, as opposed to a mobile browser or laptop. Smartphones also aren't going away any time soon. App software is evolving all the time thanks to updates and newly released hardware but the established device formats: phones and tablets, are highly unlikely to undergo a significant technological or behavioural disruption within the net few years. As a result, the Apple App Store and Google Play store for Android span the necessary distribution perspective perfectly for the time being.

How could having an App help my business grow?

There are currently around 50.31 million smartphone users in the UK alone, with global figures closer to 2.5 billion. That's a huge number of people (and potential consumers!) for you to try and reach with your app in a different way. Apps allow for an increased number of ways for users to engage with you content. For example, feature integration gives users the chance to interact with different parts of your app. Once users start to have a degree of value delivered to them by your app, they'll return more frequently, which consequently will boost conversion rates.

Apps also offer an entirely different level of personalisation for your customers, which enables tailored communication to users according to a range of factors, including their interests, location, usage behaviour, and much more. By giving your users a highly personalised experienced, you have an opportunity to gain their loyalty and trust. Depending on your business's app needs, you can choose to let users set their preferences when they first download the app.

Furthermore, your app can be used to track user engagement, and from this, you can make use this data in order to offer custom recommendations and updates to the users. Another app specific feature that can have a real impact on user retention and thus help your business grow are push notifications. Only available for apps, data for push notifications has been quantified as affecting user retention by around 820% when users opt in to receive as little as one push notification a day.

Additionally, you can choose to have your app rely on geolocation to identify the location of your users. Choosing to have geolocation provides the opportunity to give users geography- specific content, such as promotions or competitions on linked social media. Your mobile app is the ultimate way to improve the customer experience of your users. There are several feature possibilities that are exclusive to mobile apps that can help your users feel connected to your business. There's the aforementioned push notifications and geolocation, tap to call or email options, device vibration for alerts, camera integration, and instant, automatic updates.

The knock-on impact of this kind of user engagement is increased brand awareness and higher conversion rates. Plus, if you have a stronghold of international users on your app, that could be a precursory sign to expand your business internationally to take advantage of the market. Once you put an app out into the world, that isn't the end either. You can choose to continue working with an app developer to keep your content up to date and reflecting your business in the most appropriate way. You can also try out different branding tactics, host videos via your app, have a social media steam linked to the app, and release updated versions of your app to keep it working optimally for your users.

Does my business need help with a Mobile App?

That depends of what your business is! However, if you don't have an app or a team of marketers, designers, and developers who know what they're doing when it comes to building an app and launching it to the public, you may want to consider hiring someone to help. One of the most crucial stages of app building takes place before your interface design is considered and before any code is written. It involves looking at what your customers want, and this is considered heavily when we build an app.

In order to help you ascertain whether your business would benefit from having an app, we've come up with a few questions that can guide you in the right direction.

1) Will your app offer a specific solution to your customers?

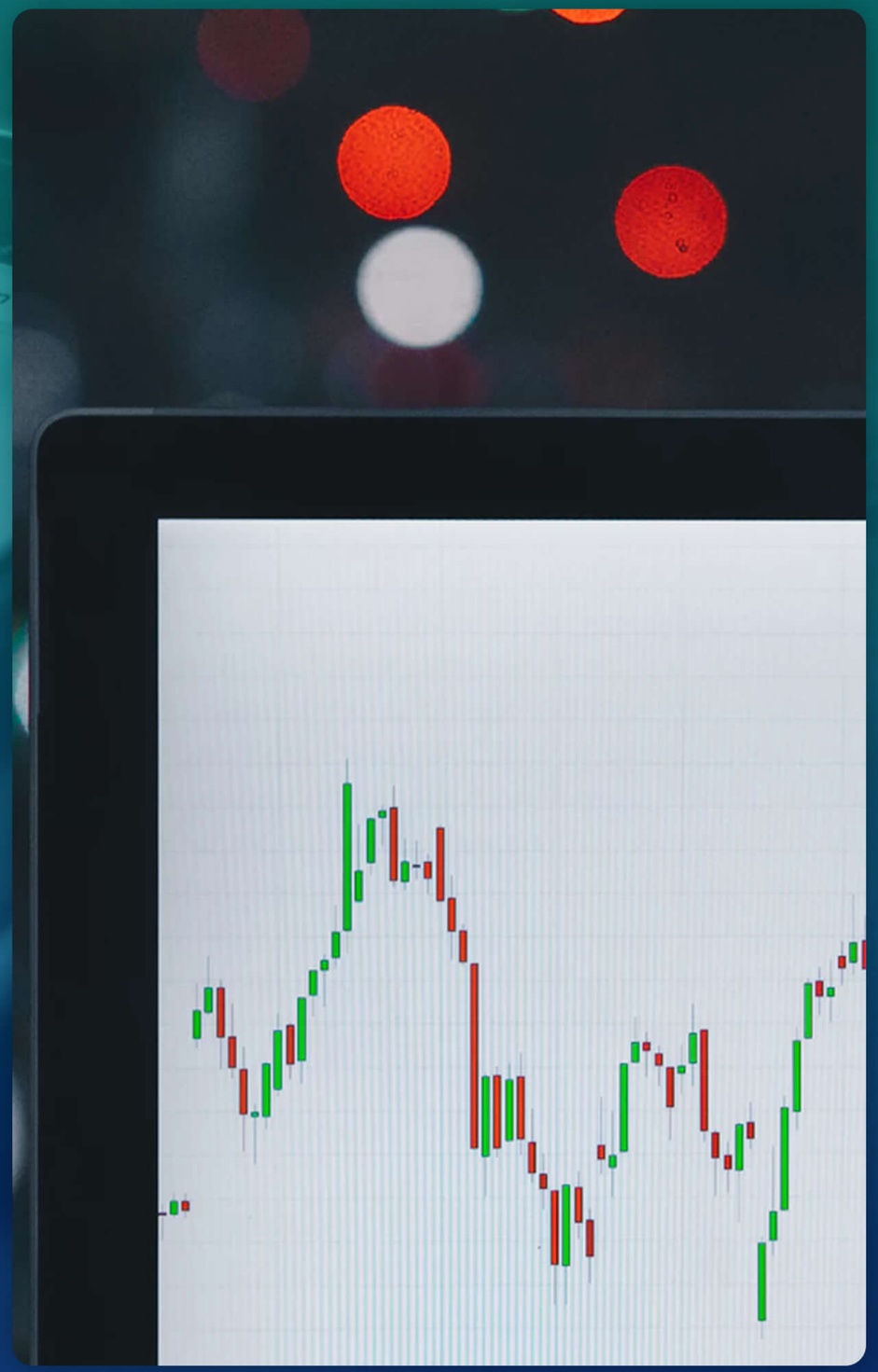
2) Are you trying to search for a database which is location based?

3) Do you find that you are getting more than 60% of your website traffic from mobile users?

4) Do you have video content or location based services to offer to consumers?

5) Is the cost of building an app worrying you?

If you found yourself saying yes to the above questions, it may be time to start thinking about choosing a partner to develop your app. We highly recommend having an experienced, dedicated partner who has proven, prior experience releasing apps to work on delivering your app vision. This is in order to ensure that not only are you happy with the finished product, but also that your customers are being guaranteed a product that will give them value, that they will return to over and over again. ICN have been featured 15 times on the front page of iTunes & Google Play, and have received major digital media award nominations. Two of our apps have been nominated in the Sunday Times Top 500 Apps in the World list, and BBC Click made an ICN App its 'Highlight of 2012'. We've worked across a wide range of sectors and are ideally positioned to help partners cost-effectively enter the App Store at #1 in their field.



How do I keep it cost effective?

Building an app is an investment, there's no way around that. However, there are a number of ways that we endeavour to keep costs down.

Way before we get the coders in to start building your app, we will draw up a comprehensive app specification for you to agree upon, identifying app features (such as push notifications!), a proposed strategy and timeline for the implementation of different phases, and the objectives behind running app testing. This spec will also include a suggestion of add-ons to run within the app for users and the different service lines offered. We aim to identify niches that your app can fulfil that are missing in the current app market. The purpose of the timeline is to highlight the length of time each service takes to provide. Our design team will also draw up an initial 'look' for a prototype service line, which will serve as the visual interface for your app, of typically between 7 and 12 screens, although this can change based on your app needs. This allows the stages of the look and feel of the design elements to be agreed upon and tweaked in a cost-efficient way. The purpose of this is to gain greater understanding of the user experience (UX) and proposed user interface (UI). Typical examples screens include a sign-up screen, home screen, dashboard and so on. Only once all these elements are approved will we start coding.

When it comes to coding, there are three options for your app. There's an iOS native app built specifically for iPhone from the ground up in Objective-C and Swift, both of which are supported by the Apple platform. The same can done for an Android native app optimised for Android phones using Java and Kotlin and supported by Google Play. The native method is slightly more expensive, but allows for more control and customisation over the app, not to mention the apps are officially supported by the platform they're built for. The alternative is building a hybrid iOS / Android version of the app using a combination of JavaScript, CSS, and HTML. Due to the sharing of a single codebase to leverage cross-platform capabilities via a middleware API, this option can be cheaper to build but may have limited capabilities. However, it can also be distributed through the official marketplace channels. .

We normally use Amazon Web Services S3 hosting for the uploading and streaming of video content. This allows users to seamlessly stream video content whenever they choose to and is a cost-efficient option for hosting video in-app. We store the database for an app (user data, dynamic content, etc) within Sashido, which enables content to be updated swiftly whenever necessary. We've found Sashido to be a reasonably low-cost, yet highly effective solution to storing app databases. ICN is in contact with numerous marketing services and platforms which offer user installs at low cost and give you the ability to quickly and cheaply increase you app's user base and rankings in the App store. We also know of free analytics platforms which give detailed reports on user sessions, active users, install rates, what sections are used the most (including roadmaps), and much more. When the appropriate solutions for your app have been agreed on, these platforms can be integrated into the build ready for launch.

We will also identify and agree with you the main channels through which to generate revenue in-app. There are a number of ways you can choose to generate revenue including:

- advertising
- sponsorship
- subscriptions
- in-app purchases
- e-commerce for physical purchases / merchandise
- email list strategy tie-in
- in-app subscription form
- licensing the code for your app to be reskinned

Unlike on web browsers, there are minimal ad blockers available for app and all require the user to download a VPN, most of which have to be paid for so the majority of mobile app users won't bother. This offers mobile apps another significant bonus over web browser ad traffic, which is affected by 26% thanks to ad blockers.

How would ICN help?

Our in-house team of coders and designers have had many years of training and first-hand experience with every aspect of designing and building applications. This has put us in a strong position in order to identify and create the perfect app design and implementation to fit your budget. We can brainstorm add-ons that your app can offer to your customer base, and think about the different service lines you want to provide. All the while, we'll keep you abreast of the time it takes to provide each service and undergo user research and testing. ICN will do the legwork to make sure that your users are being offered a good experience and good usability on your app, as this will help engender further trust in your brand. Consequently, this will positively raise the overall perception of your brand as a high quality service provider. During the development of your app, we'll keep in close contact with you to ensure that your vision is being met appropriately. We can also offer help with mobile user acquisition, search engine optimisation, App Store optimisation, analytics, and push notifications (which are very important!).

Once the timeline of your app build has elapsed, we also offer quality assurance formal testing of your app each month and can offer maintenance and updates for future versions of your app to keep users being optimally engaged. We also provide high quality digital and social media services to help you outperform your competition and cost effectively achieve your sales and marketing goals.