

THIS MONTH: **MOBILE**

EVENT TECHNOLOGY

[EM DOWNLOADS THE INDUSTRY'S TOP TECH TOOLS]

R E P O R T

EVERY CONVERSATION in the event marketing industry eventually comes around to technology. You want to know what tools are out there to make your jobs easier, make your programs more successful and most crucially, make your target consumers love you the most. We have heard your clarion calls for help and now, with this monthly series, EM's own Ken Briodagh will collect and codify the hottest, newest, most interesting, best (and sometimes worst) technological doohickeys available to you. We'll even rate them for you on a scale of 1 ("Skip it") to 5 ("Do it now").

Each installment will focus on one genre, and this report focuses on mobile devices and apps.

DEVICES

When talking mobile, one must start with the thing people have in their hands or pockets: the device. Here we go:

SMARTPHONES

OK, I know. I usually go with a specific example within the genre. And it'd be easy to do it here. There are literally hundreds of them. But, think of this: no matter the manufacturer or operating system, they're all doing the same things and trying to do it faster and more fluidly than the others. With that kind of tooth-and-nail competition out there, they'll consistently get better at doing what they do, and will become more and more indistinguishable from one another. So why mention them at all? I'll tell you, but first, the Facts:

What: A cell phone at its heart, a smartphone these days is more like a pocket computer than anything else. And every day another consumer switches from a traditional phone to one of these super devices.

Who: Basically, we're dealing with Android, Apple, Blackberry and Windows Mobile. Android and Apple are the big guns.

Cost: Consumers shell out \$200-\$300 for these things every two years at least, with new wireless contracts. Retail, you're looking at \$400-\$600.

Why you care: Yes, you frequently equip your staffers and event managers with them. Yes, you carry one and run your whole life with it. No, that's not why you care. You care because your consumers do. They want to interact with your brand on these devices, and they want it to be fun, free and useful. And they are passionate about the one they like, so, here's your tip, peeps: Be agnostic. Everything you do should be accessible to all users. Don't be a fanboy, please.

Score: 5. Seriously, if you don't have a mobile device strategy in place by now, what are you waiting for?





iPAD3

When it comes to smartphones, it really doesn't matter what you use. Tablets, on the other hand, are not all created equal. Enter the iPad, and its newest generation, the iPad3. This is the one to use. Don't bother with the others. Read on to see why, but first, the Facts:

Who: Apple. (Duh.)

What: It runs on iOS, syncs wirelessly with *everything*, including the vast Apple App Store and has a UI that is instinctive and pretty much accessible to all consumers, regardless of their tech savvy.

Cost: The same as an iPad2 used to be—\$499.

Weaknesses: Did you see the cost? It ain't the cheapest.

Why you'll buy 'em anyway: It's the fastest, it's the easiest, it's among the most powerful, has the most apps available and everyone (even the haters) loves it. I understand that the other tablet makers argue these points, and they are entitled. They are also wrong.

Score: 4. Apple's top of the heap—for now. If they get complacent, the guys at Google are going to climb right up their backs.



SONIC NOTIFY

Here's a mobile device you've never heard of. Sonic Notify is a technology designed to allow your brand to reach out and touch consumers via their own devices. It will send real-time content based on location and stated interests to any mobile device with a microphone. (That's all of them.) How, you ask? I'll tell you, but first, the Facts:

Vendor: Sonic Notify

Does it exist yet? Yes. At CMJ 2011, a new music festival, Sonic Notify connected sponsors of the event with consumers who entered a specific lounge area by giving them exclusive content about the event and the music, automatically delivered to their phones through a downloaded app.

Cost: Depends on how big you want to go. For up to 50,000 activations, it's free, but if you need 10 million, it'll cost you \$55,000 per month.

How: I'll keep it simple, but basically it works like this: a consumer is asked to download an app. They do. Then the technology uses a decoding algorithm and some basic broadcasting hardware to transmit an imperceptible audio signal to any mobile device within a certain radius. That sound carries with it the information your brand wants that consumer to have, and the app decodes it and delivers it. Simple. Just by walking by.

Score: 4. We love this idea, but it seems like it could be a little intrusive to sensitive consumers. Of course no one twisted their arms to download the app, so caveat emptor.

APPS

The other half of the mobile equation is the software. A mobile device is largely useless without an app to make it cool. We'll talk about a few of the many hundreds of thousands out there, but remember: if you want to do it... there's an app for it.



AUGMENTED REALITY

Augmented Reality, for those who don't know, is basically layering digital content over real-life. Apps are making huge strides in this by leveraging a device's built-in camera to scan a space or street and place a layer of your brand's content on it. This includes digitally collected and redeemed coupons, scavenger hunting, search and destroy missions and basically anything that you can imagine, using the same kinds of software. We'll give you some examples, but first the Facts:

Who can use it: Anyone with a smartphone or tablet.

What to avoid: Being annoying, like forcing consumers to walk around looking through their phones to pick up your promotion. Instead, ping them in real life with prompts instead, meaning, make sure the app uses the phone's GPS to alert consumers with a tone as they approach an AR area.

What can you do: The AR engine, once activated, can prompt a device to do almost anything, from launching video to taking part in a game.

Examples: Layer is the world's first mobile AR browser. It sort of integrates an AR experience with everyday device use. Not too useful yet, unless you spend your life walking around branded experiences with AR elements.

How it works: Using a smartphone's camera, GPS, compass, accelerometer and internet connection, it combines image recognition and a conceptual understanding of the 3D world to recognize objects and images and merge Augmented Reality actions into the scene, without the need for barcodes or tags.

Score: 3. I'm still not sold on AR, to be honest. Most of the time, it's still more of a pain than a gain. But, it's getting better.



SMART ACTIVATOR

This is one of a very limited class of event marketing-specific apps designed to make your lives easier. Load it onto your event staffers' mobile phones and onto the tablets your staffers use to collect data and process photo and video activation and voilà! Data collection: automated. Photo and video activation: integrated. Donation mechanism: built-in. This is not consumer-facing stuff, but you will want to take a closer look. We'll tell you why, but first, the Facts:

Developer: MoZeus

Clients: Verizon, Harley-Davidson, Miller-Coors

Cost: Depends on what you're trying to do. Talk to MoZeus.

Capabilities: The data capture function enables over-the-air wireless updates and real-time uploading without internet connection needed for capture, only reporting. And it comes with automated email response. The overlay system for photo and video activations allows you to quickly capture the experience, and send the final, composited image to the consumer in real time, with Facebook Connect, while the green-screen app automatically overlays photos onto your chosen background. Bundle these for super-pic powers. There's a lot more, but those are the highlights.

Score: 4. Don't see how this has any faults, but with a question mark on price, it can't have a 5.

—Kenneth Briodagh