State of Mobile Event Technology Annual Report 2014
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What we did

In the summer of 2014, Guidebook surveyed hundreds of event professionals who use event apps year-round for many kinds of events: ranging from 10-person meetings to 130,000-attendee conventions.

Over 500 event app administrators, primarily based in the U.S. and U.K., completed this in-depth survey. The results illuminate broad and industry-specific trends in app ROI, event pros’ priorities and goals, the emergence of new tech, app promotion methodology, and the true costs of moving to mobile.
Key findings

On average, the real cost of an event app is 1.2% of the budget for each attendee. Paper printing is twice as expensive.

Event apps are making planners better at their jobs. The #1 most important success metric for event planners - attendee satisfaction - is also the #1 value event apps deliver.

Planners are getting a return from event apps. Of respondents to whom the question applied, 91% said that their adoption of mobile event apps has produced a positive return on investment.

Eco-friendly events are a focus for most planners, and cutting back on printing and shipping is the best way to ‘go green’. 70% of respondents said it’s important for their organization to go green. 82% of those said the #1 way to go green is by reducing printing and shipping.

The top three benefits of going with an event app: planners can make last minute changes to the app, they save money on printing and shipping, and they can message attendees during the event.
Event app benefits
Event app ROI

Planners are getting a return from event apps: 91% said that their adoption of mobile event apps has produced a positive return on investment.

When first considering a mobile event app, planners may have trouble securing budget (see page 30), but they are finding that the cost is minimal compared to the old-school techniques of designing, printing, and shipping paper programs.

Once the app has been adopted, event organizers see a dramatic return on the investment and overwhelming positive response from attendees and team members alike.

91% Event app produced positive ROI
Successful events

Event apps are making planners better at their jobs. Attendee satisfaction tops the list of metrics event organizers use to gauge the success of an event, with 86% of respondents choosing it as a ‘top three’.

And that success is directly tied to having an event app: Attendee satisfaction is the #1 element most-reported as being positively affected by a mobile event app.

Event app’s effect on attendee satisfaction

- 88% positive effect
- 11% no effect
- 1% negative effect

Gauges of event success

- Attendee satisfaction
- Number of attendees
- Number of registrants
- Revenue
- Return on investment
- Social sharing
- Sponsorship renewals
- Funds raised
Why an app?

Mobile app users say that making last minute changes to guides is the #1 reason to go with a mobile event app, with 83% citing it as a benefit.

The #2 reason to move to an app? 62% of organizers say they use event apps so they can message attendees during the event.

The #3 reason (a tie): 60% of planners like that they can save money on printing, shipping and layout, and that apps increases attendee interaction.
Event app cost

We asked event app administrators to state their most recent event size, cost-per-attendee, their app costs, and their printing costs – the amount they would spend on printing if they weren’t using an app at all.
How much does an event app cost?

On average, an app costs 1.2% of the average budget for a single attendee.

In contrast, printed programs are more than twice as expensive.
By event type

Fan conventions, trade shows and education industry events have the largest disparity between app and printing costs, per-attendee.

Percent of costs vs. event type

Mobile app budget (as a % of total per-attendee cost)

Printing costs (as a % of total per-attendee cost)
By event size

Larger events saw a lower per-attendee cost for mobile apps. The disparity between app and printing costs increases as the event size grows.

Percent of costs vs. event size

- Mobile app budget as a % of total
- Printing cost as a % of total

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Mobile event tech and going green
Planners are considering environmental impact

70% of respondents said going green is important.

The best way to make events more eco-friendly? Cutting back on printing and shipping.

34% Reducing travel needs

21% Recyclable or compostable serving utensils

95% Cutting back on printing and shipping

40% Using local food providers

17% Investing in eco-friendly transportation options

41% Cutting out water bottles

43% Re-using name tags

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Cut out printing

Event apps allow you to reduce and remove printing. If you’re looking to cut back on printing, talk to the 82% of respondents who were able to do so by moving to mobile!

82%
Reduced or removed paper printing by switching to a mobile app
By event size

Smaller events are more likely to be able to reduce or remove printing entirely.

Ability to reduce or remove printing, by event size

- 100% 50 attendees or fewer
- 100% 51-100 attendees
- 85% 101-500
- 81% 501-2000
- 78% 2001-10,000
- 72% 10,001-25,000
- 59% 25,001+
By event type

91% of internal corporate meetings report being able to reduce or entirely remove printing. Small personal events, user conferences, education industry events and customer-facing corporate events are above average in printing reduction.

Ability to reduce or remove printing, by event type
New event technologies
Securing tech budget

Planners are finding it difficult to secure budget for new technologies.

How difficult is it for you to secure budget for a new event technology tool?

- Somewhat difficult: 64%
- Very difficult: 20%
- Not difficult: 16%
Ability to secure tech budget is minimally more difficult in the non-profit world, and the majority of entities still need to fight for budget.

How difficult is it for you to secure budget for a new event technology tool?

Non-profits & associations:
- Very difficult: 64%
- Somewhat difficult: 23%
- Not difficult: 13%

For-profit entities:
- Very difficult: 65%
- Somewhat difficult: 19%
- Not difficult: 16%
Event tech trends

1/3 of planners are using cloud-based presentation tools, badge scanning and phone charging stations.

Smart walls, RFID tech, NFC and beacons are still under the radar in 2014 for most planners.

These breakdowns are generally consistent across industries.
Get the skinny

Planners are primarily looking at industry blogs and publications for info about new event technologies – and they learn from colleagues and other events, too.

Where do you go for information about new event technology?

- Industry blogs & publications: 64%
- Consultants/Colleagues: 56%
- Competing events: 47%
- Industry events: 46%
- Social media: 43%
- LinkedIn groups: 16%
- Books/eBooks: 11%
First adoption

The majority of event app administrators began using event guides in 2012 and 2013.

What year did your organization build their first mobile event app?

- 2014: 21%
- 2013: 23%
- 2012: 35%
- 2011: 13%
- 2010: 4%
- 2009: 1%
- Earlier than 2009: 2%

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Event app user adoption
App guide promotion

Over half of mobile event app administrators know they’re not doing enough to promote their guides.

Guide promotion is most effective when it’s part of a planned, multi-channel marketing-style effort over time; before the event launches and on-site. And guide promotion is directly tied to ROI – the more downloads, the more worthwhile the cost and effort.

Do you believe you’re doing everything you can to promote your guides?

47% Yes

53% No
Downloads and ROI

We asked event app administrators: how many attendee downloads do you need in order for an app to be a good investment?

- 10% download rate: 1% require this for a good ROI
- 20% download rate: 3% require this for a good ROI
- 30% download rate: 11% require this for a good ROI
- 40% download rate: 11% require this for a good ROI
- 50% download rate: 25% require this for a good ROI
- 60% download rate: 12% require this for a good ROI
- 70% download rate: 19% require this for a good ROI
- 80% download rate: 11% require this for a good ROI
- 90% download rate: 4% require this for a good ROI
- 100% download rate: 2% require this for a good ROI

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Adoption rate by event size

Smaller events tend to require a higher adoption rate to get a return. This graph shows the average adoption rate (percent of total attendees who used the mobile app) planners say is required to get a positive ROI.

Average required adoption rate for positive ROI, by event size

- 50 attendees or fewer: 50%
- 51-100 attendees: 82%
- 101-500 attendees: 60%
- 501-2000 attendees: 56%
- 2001-10,000 attendees: 54%
- 10,001-25,000 attendees: 48%
- 25,001 attendees or more: 41%
App promotion methods

Email marketing and on-site signage rank as the most effective ways to increase app downloads.

Effectiveness at driving downloads

- Email marketing about the app:
  - Very effective: 36%
  - Somewhat effective: 13%
  - Not effective: 2%
  - I don’t do this: 5%

- On-site signage:
  - Very effective: 34%
  - Somewhat effective: 16%
  - Not effective: 4%
  - I don’t do this: 6%

- Social media posts with the download link:
  - Very effective: 24%
  - Somewhat effective: 44%
  - Not effective: 6%
  - I don’t do this: 6%

- Embedding the web-based guide on my website:
  - Very effective: 23%
  - Somewhat effective: 34%
  - Not effective: 4%
  - I don’t do this: 3%

- A link on the registration thank-you page:
  - Very effective: 54%
  - Somewhat effective: 28%
  - Not effective: 3%
  - I don’t do this: 2%

- Removing printed materials entirely:
  - Very effective: 22%
  - Somewhat effective: 12%
  - Not effective: 9%
  - I don’t do this: 1%
Direct feedback

Survey respondents offered some additional ways to increase event app downloads.

- Incentivize them! We offered a gift card from a random drawing to those who downloaded the app by a specific date.
- We promote the app in session intros and wrap-ups.
- Face-to-face contact: Our onsite staff mention the app during the registration/check-in process. They assist with install and use if needed.
- We mention the mobile guide during the meeting introduction.
- Word of mouth, focusing on features like photo sharing and personal schedule especially, which you can’t get without the app.
- We SMS the link to attendees’ phones.
- I add the app details to our online event brochure and create a “task” for everyone to use the app.
- We put the app details and QR code on the back of our volunteer t-shirts.
- We make the app front-and-center in vendor promotions.
Event planner concerns
We asked event planners to enter a free response to this question: **If you have event "competitors", what are they doing that worries you?**

### Top competitor worries

- **Budget**: 28%
  “They spend more money because they get more sponsorships.”

- **Technology**: 28%
  “They’re very on top of the latest trends.”

- **Size**: 21%
  “They’re going bigger, expanding with partnerships.”

- **Marketing**: 10%
  “More blogging & social media, and more attendees discussing online.”

- **Audience**: 7%
  “They have better outreach to young professionals.”

- **Event content**: 7%
  “They have more educational / interesting / interactive content and sessions.”

- **Other**: 7%
  “They’re serving sub-niches of our already-niche population in specific ways.”
We asked event planners to enter a free response to this question: **What are the biggest challenges you faced as an event/meeting planner this year?**

**Top challenges**

- **Budget**
  - We’re dealing with astronomical increases in hotel, meeting space, food, and speaker travel expenses.

- **Staff**
  - Personnel turnover.

- **Other**
  - Social event planning for a conference abroad.

- **Content**
  - Refreshing each year... there’s definitely a push to top ourselves every time!

- **Marketing**
  - Getting word out. You can only do so much and people will only listen/read so much.

- **Growth**
  - Low attendance compared to previous years.

- **Registration**
  - Transferring registration data into printing of badges, tracking payments.

- **2% Venue**
  - Will never use this hotel again.

- **Venue**
  - Will never use this hotel again.

- **Other**
  - 9% Social event planning for a conference abroad.
  - 9% Low attendance compared to previous years.
  - 8% Transferring registration data into printing of badges, tracking payments.
  - 8% Will never use this hotel again.
  - 8% Getting word out. You can only do so much and people will only listen/read so much.
  - 5% Refreshing each year... there’s definitely a push to top ourselves every time!
  - 9% Personnel turnover.
  - 45% We’re dealing with astronomical increases in hotel, meeting space, food, and speaker travel expenses.
Methodology and demographics
Guidebook sent a 31-question survey to 2,200 event app administrators, to be completed between Thursday, August 14 and Thursday, August 21.

528 people completed the survey in this time, and were given a gift card for their participation.

Types of entities they manage events for

- 64% Non-profit/association
- 28% For-profit business
- 5% Agency
- 4% This question doesn’t apply to me
Methodology and demographics

Number of events in a year (of any size) they help organize

- No events: 33%
- 1 event: 13%
- 2-3 events: 34%
- 4-10 events: 18%
- More than 11 events: 1%

Types of events they manage

- Association events: 45%
- Professional development events: 43%
- Internal corporate meetings: 24%
- Education industry events: 24%
- Trade shows (I manage): 20%
- Small personal events: 16%
- Other: 14%
- Customer-facing corporate events: 13%
- Trade shows (I send teams): 9%
- Festivals: 8%
- Fan conventions: 7%

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Methodology and demographics

- Smallest event they helped organize:
  - 50 attendees or fewer: 55%
  - 51-100 attendees: 20%
  - 101-500 attendees: 7%
  - 501-2000 attendees: 13%
  - 2001-10,000 attendees: 1%
  - 10,001-25,000 attendees: 1%
  - 25,001 or more attendees: 1%

- Largest event they helped organize:
  - 50 attendees or fewer: 1%
  - 51-100 attendees: 3%
  - 101-500 attendees: 31%
  - 501-2000 attendees: 41%
  - 2001-10,000 attendees: 16%
  - 10,001-25,000 attendees: 4%
  - 25,001 or more attendees: 4%

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