

Customer App-reciation

by Emily Rudduck

More and more campuses are turning to mobile apps to deliver valuable information to students.



When you think of customer service, what is the first thing that pops into your mind? A genuine smile? A pleasant phone voice? A firm handshake?

Those are all valuable traits to have, for sure, but on today's campuses customer service does not happen face-to-face as much as

it once did. Months before students move to campus, coming from points all around the globe, they initiate their experience with a campus and its housing department via a computer screen. How does the technology piece fit into the overall customer service puzzle?

Many campuses have been

turning to the use of mobile apps that are accessed on smart phones and tablets, which is an easy way to transmit information, as most students arrive on campus with their laptops, smartphones, and tablets readily available. Those who do not own or know how to operate a mobile device or laptop are few and far between, and, for many, it is their preferred means of communication. With that in mind, introducing mobile applications that are accessible from app stores on both Android and iOS services is an effective, convenient way for faculty and staff to broaden their reach to students.

by the Guidebook platform, it is an overarching app that allows event organizers to easily share materials. Accommodation Services provides students with a multitude of options to select from to enhance their residence life experience. This is especially beneficial for first-year students, as Laura Burge, residential education manager, explains. “With the arrival of 1,100 new students each year, communicating essential information regarding arrival processes, important rules and guidelines, key staff, and student contact details and orientation schedules is difficult

Guidebook, then access the MSU Live on 2014, which allows the student to view times and locations of meetings centered around transitional housing, similar to the way in which students are able to create a schedule at La Trobe University. Michael Dawisha, chief information officer, says that “we are working on our own custom responsive design suite of apps.”

The Welcome Guide is only the beginning for La Trobe University’s mobile app, as it also allows returning students as well as first-year students to create a digital personal schedule that is directly based upon programs

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Everything from a move-in checklist to an outline of programs and upcoming events that keep students well informed on various support services or ways to get involved in residence life can reach students through mobile apps. Whether these apps are built in-house or utilize an outside vendor, they can facilitate the communication that allows residence life staff to ensure their relevancy in students’ lives and interact with them in a way that is changing the face of their field.

La Trobe University in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, has cultivated an application that is available for students to download on their smartphone, tablet, or computer. Accommodation Services officially launched the app called Live @ La Trobe in February of 2014. Powered

and time consuming.” With the application, first-year students are able to download important guides specifically designed for the first-year experience. The Welcome Guide, available for students to easily refer to, includes all of the typical information found within a traditional welcome guide, but what sets it apart from its conventional email or paper counterpart is that it is “easily accessible, visually well-presented, and, most importantly, mobile,” Burge says.

Searching through any online app store will turn up a host of apps focused on campus living. For instance, Michigan State University in East Lansing offers an app that is used through Guidebook. Students who are in the process of transitional housing move-in can download

and events that are highlighted within the app. For example, on any particular day, a student can filter through events that are available that day or in the future. They can then select an event at a specific time and add that event to their personal calendar. Subsequently, the student can then review their unique schedule at any time using the Accommodation Services application.

Keeping track of events and programs can be cumbersome to both staff and students. However, Accommodation Services eradicates misinformation and miscommunication by allowing for instant updates, including possible date, time, and venue changes. Authorized staff can enter the application’s interface to update information, which, in turn, notifies

students of the change by way of the inbox feature.

The application is designed to be more interactive than a piece of paper that students could otherwise toss in the trash. Those who are hesitant to approach residence life staff can view bios of student leaders and staff through the app. Additionally, an interactive map allows them to navigate campus and support services confidently. Should a student have a quick question, the FAQ tab offers answers to many commonly asked questions so that students can build their level of independence. Most important, should a resident ever question what is and is not permitted within the hall, Important Rules and Guidelines is a tab that contains reader-friendly documents outlining

the expectations for residential students.

The feedback from students has shown an overwhelming sense of support. Feedback can be given on the app itself through the app service that the student has downloaded it from, such as Google Play or App Store, but Burge feels that the numbers speak for themselves, “with more than 1,200 downloads of the app within the first month of its launch and more than 2,700 downloads of our first-year Welcome Guide.” Students have said that the app contains information that is relevant and easy to access. “It’s a great idea since almost everyone has a smartphone these days,” said one student. Additionally, Burge notes that “nearly 90 percent of students surveyed rated the app

overall as ‘good’ or ‘very good.’”

The app is not limited to students; it can also act as an interactive tool for parents, friends, and community members to access information. This is particularly beneficial for parents who want to review payment and fee information as well as current campus events affecting their son or daughter, all while the app keeps the student’s personal schedule private. La Trobe University has felt that this publicly accessible and unified information center contributes to better engagement on the part of students as well as faculty and staff.

La Trobe University’s innovation was recognized at the Australasian Association of College & University

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Housing Officers (AACUHO) conference in 2014; according to Burge, it was “very well received, and its presentation was the winning paper of the conference.” Although La Trobe University’s mobile app has a lot to offer, Edwina Ellicott, president of AACUHO, says that the most important thing is that the “Accommodation Services app has cut through the noise. It is a relevant and effective tool in which to communicate important messages to new and existing students in residence.”

Introducing a mobile application for first-year and returning students opens the door for continued communication and fosters a deeper and more personal bond than flyers, papers, and otherwise costly promotion materials both for

general information and for events in residence life. Students benefit from the convenient, easily accessible information, and staff benefit from the inexpensive but effective transmission of information. **TS**

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