

Corporate Incentive Travel

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Column - July 2010

Perspective

Say Hello To Memorable Meetings By Answering The Call For Powerful Enterprise-Level Smart-Phone Apps

As a meeting planner, one of your main objectives is to create an unforgettable experience for your attendees. Whether the meeting is a corporate convention or an incentive travel reward, you want people to leave the event feeling happy and appreciated, and that their time (and money) was well spent.

However, you also know that any meeting, whether large or small, often has confusion and rough patches to overcome. Long registration lines, large conference centers that are poorly mapped, and group excursions that get canceled due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances are just a few of the hassles any meeting planner has to deal with.



Daniel Burrus

Fortunately, as tomorrow's technology unfolds before us, namely in the form of smart pads and smart phones, the future of meeting planning is getting easier and more profitable. Because these new smart devices include phones, multimedia computers, video-conferencing platforms, still and video cameras, locators and navigators, and game and entertainment centers that are with us 24/7, they are transforming all areas of life.

Additionally, today's app software revolution is bringing to the forefront a new level of apps — what I've coined Enterprise Level Apps. These are apps that are designed to serve a specific profession, such as nursing, pharmaceutical sales or, in this case, meeting planning.

Combine this with the real-time data revolution that's also taking place, and you can see how groundbreaking enterprise apps are. Never before have people been able to get information and data in their hands customized for their unique needs right as it's happening. So when something occurs, information updates, or a need arises, that information is immediately visible to anyone authorized to see it. To have that visibility — and have it with you 24/7 in the form of an app — is both powerful and amazing.

How Meeting Apps Can Work

Here are some examples of how this new app technology can work for meeting planners:

- Mapping of hotels and convention centers. Just as Google mapped our streets, in the very near future hotels and convention centers will be mapped the same way. As such, meeting attendees will be able to download a free app that helps them navigate inside buildings so they can find their meeting rooms, their hotel rooms, their dining halls, etc. As a benefit to meeting planners, such an app will reduce and eventually eliminate the hassles of creating and displaying signage for attendees. Rather than search for signs pointing them to a particular room or event hall, attendees will simply pull out their smart phone or smart pad and get turn-by-turn directions to their desired interior location.
- Location awareness for attendees. Anyone who has

Rather than search for signs pointing them to a particular room or event hall,

been to a large conference or hotel knows how difficult it can be meeting up with associates, prospects or key contacts. While geo-social networking tools such as Loopt and Foursquare are available to the mainstream market and are somewhat helpful at meetings, meeting planners in the near future will have access to customized apps that enable registered meeting attendees to easily find each other within the meeting facility. So rather than try to coordinate a meeting spot with someone, attendees will be able to pull up the app, say the person's name, and immediately see where they are in the hotel or conference center. They can then walk right over to the person. This not only eliminates the hassle of people having to wait for each other, but it also lessens the stress associated with trying to meet that key person.

- Management of agendas. Instead of standing in registration lines, attendees can register for the conference and for various events with an app. Immediately upon registration, all the conference materials can be downloaded to the person's smart pad or smart phone. Additionally, each day the app can show people what's on their personal agenda for the day, the times and locations of the various meetings and events they're registered for, how to get to the meeting spots, the speaker's presentation slides, and any needed handouts or supplemental materials. Then, if an event or meeting gets canceled or delayed, those who were registered for it know immediately, and they know what the alternate plans are. If people are part of a group where each person is doing a different activity, they can stay updated on everyone's status so they can all rendezvous later. Having such up-to-date information helps keep attendees in enjoyment mode and eliminates many of the stressors that come with meetings and travel.

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The Best Meeting Ever

Apps such as these have many benefits: They eliminate some of the meeting planner's work; they make the meeting run smoother; they eliminate common stressors for the attendees; and ultimately, they make the meeting planner look good. Customized apps like these for meeting planners are currently in development. And when they hit the market they'll empower meeting planners, attendees, hotel and conference center staff, and anyone else involved with meeting planning with real time tools and data that will streamline processes and ultimately increase both productivity and profits. C&IT

Daniel Burrus, a leading technology forecaster and strategist, is the founder and CEO of Burrus Research, a research and consulting firm that monitors global advancements in technology. He is the author of six books, including Technotrends: How to Use Technology to Go Beyond Your Competition (Collins, 1994). Contact him at www.burrus.com.