

iPhone app boosts Islands' festival awareness

By Shane Nelson

The Hawaii Tourism Authority launched its free "Festivals of Hawaii" app for the iPhone, iPod and iPad on Aug. 4, giving travelers access to information about more than 100 of the Islands' cultural festivals and celebrations.

"We wanted to provide both visitors and residents an easy way to find out what was going on in the community," said Michael Story, tourism brand manager for the HTA. "There are all of these different festivals and events that happen, and we just thought it was an appropriate way, because of the way technology is headed, to promote all these events that we support."

Story said the HTA spends more than \$9 million annually on Hawaii cultural festivals and community events.

"Many of these festivals are also quality-of-life-type events that we like to fund," he added. "So it provides the residents that outlet or entertainment vehicle that many times is free, and they can just go out and enjoy it."



App users can find out information about the Merrie Monarch Festival on the Big Island.

According to Story, the festivals and events also provide a valuable platform for visitors and residents to mix, offering travelers an opportunity to enjoy a more authentic Hawaii experience.

"More and more people aren't just coming here for the sunset and surf," he said. "They are coming here because they want to really find about the culture and the people and the traditions."

Festivals of Hawaii users can search events by island and options are broken into four major categories: Hawaiian, arts and music, cuisine and sports. The app also enables users to search by

location and choose options with the "Near Me" function, which makes use of the platform's GPS capability and provides directions via Google Maps.

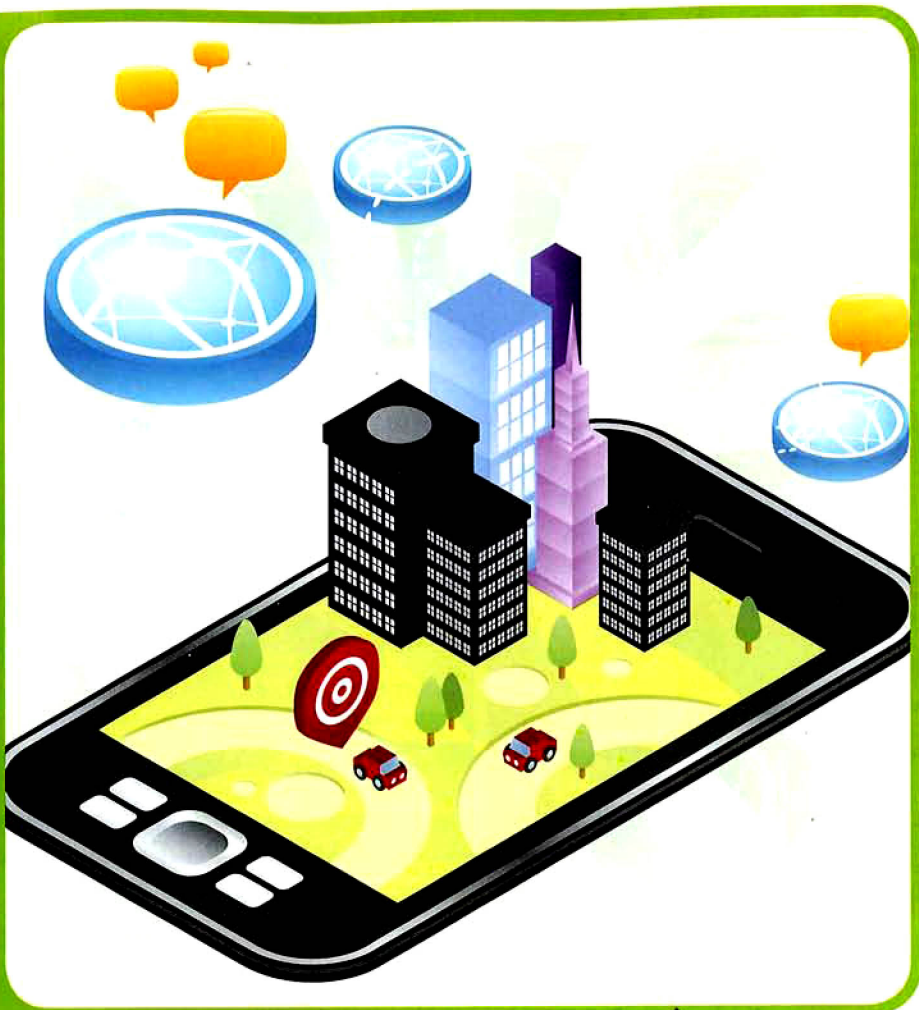
Event profiles include images and brief descriptions of each happening drawn from a full range of 12 detailed subcategories, including farmers markets, eco-tourism options, ethnic festivals, art exhibits and health and wellness gatherings.

"And this is just phase one," Story said. "For phase two we are really looking to build it out so that it's available on more smartphones like the Android. We also are looking at starting to push in a few more festivals and events, so it's definitely going to grow."

The Festivals of Hawaii app is available for download on iTunes. To learn more, visit www.gohawaii.com.

When APPS APPLY

More Local
Businesses
Go Mobile



With a smartphone and a fingertip, anyone can track the weather, follow a sports team, find things to do, and stay connected with friends and family. But apps are also providing new opportunities for local businesses and organizations.

Hawai'i companies are increasingly exploring the mobile world. "The biggest local trend with mobile apps is brand awareness," says developer Brian Dote, founder of Tapiki LLC, which develops custom apps for local businesses. Tapiki worked on the Malama Card, a shopping rewards card originally built into a free app for client Kamehameha Schools. Vendors at the malls operated by the school offer discount programs in which customers show the app on their smartphone to redeem deals instead of carrying around a card.

Tapiki also developed the Festivals of Hawai'i app released by the Hawai'i Tourism Authority last August. Visitors use it to plan activities weeks or months before they arrive in the Islands; residents are also beginning to find it useful. "Technology is constantly evolving,

and this is one of our creative ways to market Hawai'i to the world," says Michael Story, tourism brand manager for HTA, which promotes more than 100 festivals and events statewide.

When HTA launched the app August 4, it generated thousands of downloads for the iPhone, iPod and iPad within hours. HTA also shared the direct link to the app on Facebook and Twitter and, according to Story, generated more than 500 clicks on the download link within a short amount of time.

Story says 85 percent of downloads are in North America, 12 percent in Asia and the rest from as far off as the Middle East. HTA is planning to develop the app for Android and Blackberry devices as well.



WANT YOUR OWN APP?

“There is a lot of demand [for apps] and not enough developers—we have a two-month backlog,” says Leuck. So while you wait, here are some tips to consider before making the developmental plunge.

EVALUATE THE NEED

Free and existing apps make sense for many businesses. Some companies might be better off using an app that is already popular with consumers instead of developing their own, says Leuck. For example, restaurants can benefit from foursquare, Gowalla or Yelp and might not need a custom app like a media company or newspaper chain that must update new data frequently would.

HAVE A PURPOSE

Pinpoint your goal for the app. Is it to attract customers, offer more services, increase brand awareness, or market virally? Once you identify your purpose, examine whether the app fulfills it.

A successful app needs to do, fix or improve something for the user. “Unless the app satisfies a consumer need or has a value-added benefit, folks won’t download it—not even for free,” says Dote. Even if the app meets your specifications, ensure the user’s need is also met.

KNOW WHOM YOU’RE REACHING

The app must fit the target, so, first and foremost, make sure your customers are actually smartphone or tablet users. Four out of five businesses inquire about Mac iOS for iPhones and iPads, followed by Android for Google phones and browser-based Mobile Web applications (like your website but for much smaller screens), says Leuck. Most businesses develop apps for iOS, iPads and iPhones because such users are more likely to spend money. The Android platform has good market penetration, but users tend to spend less, Leuck says.

WATCH YOUR RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Dote says clients can spend \$3,000 to \$5,000 for an app that offers brand awareness with development time of a few weeks. More complex apps like an iPhone game—whether built as a marketing tool or stand-alone—can cost \$60,000 to \$100,000 and

Phone Fact

As of July, 40 percent of US mobile consumers over 18 had smartphones, according to Nielsen Media Research.

For more tips from the pros, visit:

- lkayzo.com
- Tapiki.com

take anywhere from three months to a year to develop. Beware of making superfluous feature changes; these can put you over the top.

Be sure to factor marketing and promotional costs into the budget as well. A marketing plan should precede contracting app development. Without a solid plan, your new app will be lost among hundreds of thousands of others when it launches.

In addition, Dote says businesses need to consider the cost of app maintenance and updates. “Users love apps that evolve, change, grow,” he says. “New features, fresh content, bug fixes—these all add to the overall cost of a product.”

When entering the arena of this evolving technology, consider all the options and consequences. But rest assured, apps are here to stay. As mobile devices with more computing power and smaller, more powerful sensors enter the market, Dote says, they’ll be everywhere. ▶

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briefly

COURTESY HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY



Tourism bureau introduces mobile app for isle events

Keep track of your favorite farmers markets, festivals and cultural events with a free mobile app launched by the Hawaii Tourism Authority. The Festivals of Hawaii app provides details on more than 100 events throughout the islands and is available for download on iTunes for iPhone, iPod and iPad devices.

Users can search by island, "near me" and category, which includes Hawaiian, Cuisine, Sports, Nature/Eco-Tourism and Arts & Music. Selecting "directions" will pull up Google maps showing the location.

The tourism agency said that while the first phase of the mobile app development features festivals and events sponsored by the HTA, the next phase will widen the searchable database to include other events.