



Law firms get app happy

Could an app be an effective marketing tool for your firm? Would it generate repeated use?

BY ANAYAT DURRANI

The stats don't lie. Smartphones and their users are inseparable. A study commissioned at the end of 2010 by Google and conducted by Ipsos OTX, an independent market research firm, sought to understand how smartphones are used in consumers' daily lives. The study found that 81 percent browse the web, 77 percent use search and 48 percent watch videos on their phones.

Among those who use their phones for mobile browsing, 95 percent searched for local information, including contact info for local businesses, mapping locations of restaurants and accessing business's Web sites. Eighty-eight percent of those that found information through their smartphone acted on it within a day, and 77 percent used it to contact a business.

It's not surprising then, that law firms are developing their own apps to capture smartphone users' attentions. With the number of smartphone users worldwide predicted to exceed one billion by 2014, having a mobile presence is increasingly becoming a desirable option for many law firms.

"iPhone apps and Android apps have become extremely popular among lawyers. I would say they are one of the biggest industries we develop apps for," said Andrew Gazdecki, CEO of Bizness Apps, based in Chico, Calif. "We have created apps for almost every type of lawyer from personal injury and criminal defense to patent lawyers."

Do law firms really need "an app for that"?

There are apps for everything these days, so much so that the tagline: "There's an app for that," has become an understatement. Law firms have developed a

variety of apps, some for general advertising purposes, some to assist clients, and others to benefit the general public.



Gazdecki

So, are law firm apps a useful investment or just a waste of time and money? Attorney Daniel Friedlander knows a thing or two about apps. A land-use attorney and litigator at Jackson DeMarco Tidus & Peckenpaugh in Westlake Village, he is also the creator of iPhone and iPad apps like Court Days Pro (\$2.99), Court Days (\$0.99), myMCLE (\$0.99), TallyPad (\$0.99), and Workdays (\$0.99). Friedlander said he has mixed feelings about law firm apps.

"Apps that seek to advertise products without offering any functional value fail because, (one), people are generally not interested in downloading advertising-based apps or, (two), even if the app is really interesting to look at, it does not generate repeated use by individual users," explained Friedlander. "In other words, if users download the app at all, they will look at it once and never open it again. Converting those app-views to interest in the advertised product – in our case a law firm's services – is extremely difficult, and probably unlikely."



Friedlander

Friedlander said when taken into consideration that developing an app can range in cost from \$50,000 for simple apps and can rise to \$250,000, "creating an advertising app is a risky endeavor." Eric Goldman, Associate Professor at Santa Clara University School of Law and Director at the High Tech Law Institute, agrees. He said while truly useful apps are a win for

consumers and prospective clients, it's less clear whether they will prove successful for the law firms.

"Getting widespread consumer adoption of apps is tricky and potentially expensive," Goldman said. "Obviously, if the app is never downloaded, then it's a lousy investment; but if the app is downloaded by people who aren't likely prospective clients, it may be a poor investment as well."

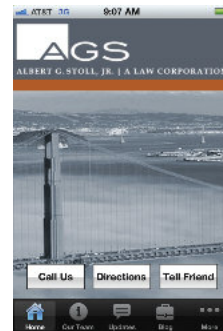
Gazdecki of Bizness Apps said his company's app building platform allows attorneys to customize their apps by building in features like accident cameras, evidence cameras, consultation forms, appointment forms, legal tips, blog RSS feeds, and YouTube channel feeds. Gazdecki, who developed an app for

personal-injury firm Albert G. Stoll Law Corporation in San Francisco, said apps can make law firms look more cutting edge.

"This can play a huge role in winning a client's business. It adds credibility to a law firm and helps them stand out from their crowded industry," said Gazdecki. "With our company, lawyers can create mobile apps for less than a newspaper ad. With that in mind the question becomes why would you not create a mobile app?"

A look at some law firm apps

San Francisco-based Morrison & Foerster created the MoFo2Go app (free) launched March 5, 2010, one of the first apps developed by a law firm. The app



AGS App



MoFo2Go App

was developed by the Rubenstein Technology Group, which won the first ever BtoB Best Branded App Award for their MoFo2Go app, by BtoB Magazine. The magazine described the app as “a serious tool, referring users to relevant articles and publications, as well as attorney bios.

The app also has an entertaining side, including maps suggesting where clients can stay or eat when visiting Morrison & Foerster offices.” The app also has a GPS to direct people to their various offices and a maze game.

“MoFo2Go has exceeded our expectations,” said Rich Franconeri, Director of Marketing at Rubenstein Technology Group. “The firm’s goal of about 1,000 total downloads was exceeded in the first three months. Now the app is nearing 4,000 downloads.”

Locke Lord, a full service national law firm, has an app that allows firm clients and prospective clients to connect with Locke Lord lawyers quickly through their iPhones or iPads. Users can click to find a Locke Lord attorney and click again to contact him or her by phone or e-mail. Users also can find local hotels and restaurants near the Locke Lord office, use GPS for directions to the office, sign up for firm events, and view a partner’s biographical information. The firm said it developed the app, released in December 2010, “after internal research showed the majority of the Firm’s Web site visitors accessed the site through iPhones and iPads.”

Some law firms are creating apps that both help the client and market their firm. Arizona-based Internet law firm, Kelly Law Firm LLC, developed an app, released in July 2011, that allows clients to manage their case, where they can chat live with firm personnel, make payments with PayPal, view one’s to-do list via Basecamp, and access their files

stored in Dropbox, and the firm’s social media platform. Founder Aaron Kelly said he originally developed the app because many of his clients are in the technology and Internet industry and are always on the go.

“They’re busy people, and I don’t expect them to keep up with every little minute detail of their matter,” explained Kelly. “On the other hand, I had some clients that would ask me for timeframes on things, and where they could pay their bill, or where they could upload files. Then it hit me. The one thing all my clients had in common was a cell phone, whether it was an iPhone or Android.”

Since creating the app, Kelly said the response has been “awesome.” He has received many calls from users who love the app and its ease of use, “and how they didn’t expect a lawyer to really dream up something like it.”

He said he gets a lot of calls and e-mails from inside the app, but said it was created and is used as a tool for his existing clients. Kelly said people who come across the app, usually then go online to find out more about his firm, adding, “it definitely has paid for itself by now.”

In the process, he said a lot of lawyers have contacted him because they want to develop a similar app. He said he is always happy to talk with them to discuss how it could or couldn’t work with their practice.

“It’s important to not just go out and get an app, just because everyone else is doing it,” said Kelly. “I tried to set myself apart from others when I built it and I think I accomplished that.”

More specialized apps

Rosen Law Firm, the largest divorce firm in North Carolina, developed the North Carolina Child Support Calculator app (free), released July 14, 2010, which follows state guidelines to figure out the amount of child support paid or received by North Carolina families. It determines support levels for sole custody, split custody and shared custody using all North Carolina worksheets.

Stark & Stark in New Jersey has the Divorce app and the Personal Injury app, both free. The Divorce app, launched in August 2011, features a Divorce Journal to store personal notes regarding a person’s divorce, one-touch access to call the police in the case of a domestic violence incident, and videos from their attorneys addressing issues like custody, equitable distribution, alimony and domestic violence. Their Personal injury app, launched in October 2011, has an emergency contact center, a tool to capture photos and audio at the scene of an accident and accident forms to report when someone is involved in an accident.

“Many people have downloaded our apps and have shared with us that the apps provide a myriad of useful resources,” said Cindy Mark Conley, marketing director for Stark & Stark.

Conley said the apps allow users a fast way to contact an attorney, get information about the firm, and link to their other social media tools like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube.

“We have always been ahead of the technology curve and like to provide cutting edge services to our clients,” said Conley. “For example, in 2004 we were the first law firm to create a law blog. The integration of our two apps is a small part of our overall social media strategic marketing plan.”

The Orange County personal-injury law firm Bisnar Chase and the American Lawyer Academy created the Car Accident SideKick app (free), released September 2011. It has an emergency checklist and on-the-scene car accident tools to guide users on what to do after an accident, from alerting emergency personnel to documenting details of the accident to helping file a real-time insurance claim.

“Our goal was to build awareness of our firm by providing a valuable tool that educates and assists people about what to do after a traffic collision,” said John Bisnar, founder of Bisnar Chase. “Generally, the people we represent are in no condition to collect information at the scene of a



collision. We designed Car Accident SideKick for people who have been involved in relatively minor collisions – ones that don't warrant an attorney's involvement – to provide direction about what to do and how to handle information gathering. Also, the app makes the transfer of information to insurance companies easier."

The app also helps users by allowing them to get legal advice from a qualified attorney in their area for free. It also has an accident scene locator service to help determine cross streets and includes a flashlight and voice recorder.

"Downloads of Car Accident SideKick have surpassed our estimates. We've gotten a number of favorable reviews in national technology-oriented press, the most significant being CNET. We're happy with the overall results to date," said Bisnar.

"The feedback from people who have downloaded the app has been very positive, which has been rewarding, especially for my team who came up with the idea and made it happen."

Reference apps and job apps

Global law firm Latham & Watkins launched its U.S. Book of Jargon app (free) September 14, 2011, a glossary of more than 750 legal, business and financial terms. The app gives lawyers and bankers quick access to the glossary during important meetings or in the courtroom. The firm said the app gives the "A's-Z's of Wall Street jargon, including acronyms regularly used to describe key government regulations, slang phrases adopted by professionals in the corporate finance and banking arenas, and other legal phrases and definitions."

International law firm McKenna Long & Aldridge developed their app called Mergers & Acquisitions Quick Reference Guide (free), originally released in hard copy in 2006. It contains chapters from a business perspective, on key aspects, issues and documents involved in a merger or acquisition transaction. Corporate Department Chair Wayne N. Bradley, said they launched the app in September 2011, "for our clients and

others who are involved in deal activity who need either advice or a primer on the key aspects, issues and documents involved in M&A transactions. Now they can access this information whenever they need it."

There's an app for job applicants too. New York-based Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom launched an app called Skadden Start Here (free). Users can track Skadden's recruiting schedule and interview process, find its global offices and learn facts about the firm, such as their flexible maternity leave program. The app has contact info for those directly in charge of global hiring at the firm. Users can also scan business cards they receive from Skadden networking events and immediately add their contact information to a digital list.

Benesch Attorneys at Law, a business law firm in Cleveland, also has their own informational app called "Appportunity" released in May 2011. They created the app to contact applicants when an employment opening comes up at the firm. And, law school students and graduates can see a calendar of the firm's on-campus recruiting schedule, find a listing of alumni by school and get alerts when a new employment listing is posted.

Benesch's Senior Marketing Communications Manager, Julie Gurney, said, "What's unique about our recruiting app is that it's not just a rehashing of information from the firm's Web site. Through strong collaboration between the firm's Marketing, Technology and Recruiting Departments, we've developed something that is not only fun to use and on the cutting edge of legal industry technology, but it is also extremely practical and relevant to its intended audience."

The future is mobile

A recently launched Web site called LawFirmMobile.com keeps track of and analyzes law firm apps. Matt Gross, blogger for the site, said he has noticed an increase in interest by law firms in learning how to develop mobile apps or how to mobile-optimize their Web site.

"In general, the most impressive law firm mobile apps we've seen are the ones that solve a specific need for consumers. For example, if a law firm can provide a free law database on a technical topic, and anyone can access that from their iPhone or Android phone, that can be very useful," said Gross. "Another approach we like is the law firms that provide real-time feeds of content from their blog, video channels, social media Web sites, or other sources. That approach works especially well if the app is focused on a specific area of law."

Gross believes apps that focus on a narrow area of law are more likely to be downloaded and used over and over again. "That's obviously good branding for a law firm and is also more likely to bring in client leads."

Friedlander, the attorney who developed the Court Days app, said if law firms approached app development from the standpoint of providing a useful tool or product to a consumer, "then the app may incidentally result in business for the firm." He cites Rosen Law Firm's child support calculator as a good example of this. He said that someone who has a family law issue and no attorney, and who downloads the app, "may be tempted to contact the Rosen Law Firm for assistance" if they become unhappy with the results they are getting with self-representation.

Friedlander also believes that a practice-area-specific news app could be successful. He cited the example of employers or employees who might be interested in the latest developments in wage and hour law. Friedlander said a law firm app "that provides news of recent court cases and administrative rulings could result in calls to the law firm."

Professor Goldman said getting the app into the right hands is crucial for the app's success, but admits that's the hard part. As a result, he says, probably only a small number of apps, those that become "hits," will prove profitable for law firms. "The rest won't be. Unfortunately, a law firm contemplating developing an app



may not be able to guess its success in advance,” said Professor Goldman.

Mobile-optimized Web site

In his experience, Gross said for most firms simply offering a mobile-optimized Web site will prove a more effective option than developing a mobile app. He said the most important factor to consider with a mobile Web site is ensuring its ease of use, allowing users to immediately find the information they seek. “That can be achieved by using techniques such as a big font, having pages

that scroll vertically rather than horizontally, easy navigation to get around the Web site, and a phone number that can be clicked to call,” said Gross.

Summary

The future is indeed mobile and choosing the route to mobile success is critical. “If law firms start from the premise that the app is first a functional tool, and secondarily an advertising vehicle, the app may generate some business for the law firm,” said Friedlander. “Apps that are entirely advertisements and don’t offer



Durrani

some functionality are destined to fail. After all, who turns on the TV just to watch commercials?”

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