

App-tastic! Smartphone Apps Changing the Way We Work

There was a day, not so long ago, that mobile phones were, well, phones. We used them to make and receive telephone calls on the go... and maybe a text or two. Now, when you see someone who has a phone that simply makes calls, inevitably you think, "Well... isn't that cute?" (Or, for the more manly among us, "Sheesh, old school much?") The fact is, today, most people have and use smartphones. As recently as last year, smartphones made up less than 50 percent of all phones sold -- though they were predicted to reach that benchmark by the end of 2011.



Well, a funny thing happened -- by the end of the first quarter of 2011, smartphone sales topped 54 percent of all mobile phone sales in the U.S., according to statistics gathered by the Nielsen Company. This number shows deep and rapid penetration of smartphones in the mobile phone market. Of that number, 37 percent are Android OS phones and 27 percent are Apple iOS phones. Another 22 percent are RIM Blackberry OS phones, but while both Apple and Android sales were up, Blackberry sales dropped 11 percent in Q1 2011. These numbers show no sign of stopping, and reflect a major change in the way we get and use our information. In short, we want our info anywhere, any time and at our fingertips.

Smartphones are reaching the level of a "must-have" for everyone, and their impact cannot be ignored by any organization. So how do we leverage smartphone technology for our business success? It's more than simply outfitting the staff with smartphones! No, indeed. The key word is Apps -- or smartphone mobile applications. The world was introduced to the App, thanks primarily to the iPhone. The App is what makes a smartphone smart, in many ways. The Apple App store has over 425,000 Apps available, while the Android market has over 500,000 available. (In contrast, the Blackberry App World just passed 10,000 Apps in September 2010.)

So, we should make Apps, right? Well, maybe. An App for the sake of having an App is a waste of time, money and resources. A badly-developed App can be worse than no App at all. And of course, there is a lot to consider when creating an App -- required budget (higher than you might assume), target audience, purpose and expected outcome from the App's development and distribution, even type of App: native App, web App or hybrid App. The choices and possibilities are endless -- and the subject of a future article, so stay tuned! In the mean time, let's look at some Apps and App categories currently on the market that make our lives easier and our businesses run more smoothly.

There are some obvious App categories -- GPS/navigation Apps, calendar/appointment management Apps, contact management Apps. Yet, there are many other Apps specific to the AV industry that can greatly aid installers and design engineers on a regular basis. For example, there are Apps that allow you to use your smartphone as a level, a clinometer or a stud finder. There are Apps to calculate image size, installation distance and keystone correction requirements for projector installations. Network mapping Apps can scan networks for device IP addresses and scan ports on specific devices, while pinout Apps can provide accurate pinout information and wiring diagrams for many common connectors.

If you are planning to outfit your staff with smartphones -- or if they already use them -- it is worth checking out the world of manufacturer and third-party Apps available to the AV industry. Some are iOS only, others Android only, and some available in multiple platforms -- but all have the potential to transform and improve the way we do business by providing necessary information on demand, wherever we are. And that is simply App-tastic news.

Dawn Meade, CTS -- also known as AVDawn -- is an industry veteran with experience in integration, AV sales, and social media. You can find her on Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com/avdawn>), on her AV tech blog (www.avdawn.com), and of course, here at rAVe as a staff writer and as part of the rAVe BlogSquad.