

BUSINESS & CAREERS

Useful smartphone apps for lawyers



HI-TECH

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Smartphone users habitually check unread message counts. Canny law firms can leverage that common compulsion by putting unread counts on their own smartphone apps, which are among today's most effective opt-in marketing tools.

Little wonder, given the increasing popularity of smartphones. John Robinson quotes research firm Gartner's assertion that 80 per cent of North Americans will carry smartphones by 2014 in Panvista Media Corp.'s white paper *Law Firms Going Mobile*.

"In the legal space, that number is closer to 100 per cent today," says Panvista's marketing and strategy vice-president.

The upshot? Increasing numbers of people will visit your firm's site from smartphones, and unless you offer either an app or a version of your website that is optimized for the smartphone screen and takes advantage of its hardware, you'll subject visitors to:

- untold amounts of tedious scrolling and zooming;
- not being able to use smartphone-specific hardware like GPS.

Today's mobile platforms

Firms primarily target Apple Inc.'s iPhone and Research In Motion Ltd.'s (RIM) BlackBerry.

Aside from being relatively easy to develop for, increasing numbers of lawyers carry iPhones for personal use in addition to work-issue BlackBerrys.

But RIM remains regnant.

"The BlackBerry accounts for more than 75% of legal app page-



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views," Panvista writes in its white paper, "which means that while BlackBerrys are more difficult to develop for, the return is well worth the extra development challenges."

"For development purposes, BlackBerry has not made app creation an easy process," the paper explains. "There are currently 32 different (BlackBerry) devices that vendors need to support and optimize apps for. Each of these devices requires a slightly different strategy due to changing screen sizes and hardware setups. App development on this platform is extremely fragile, but the resulting ability to reach a very specific professional audience makes it an attractive marketing opportunity."

Other platforms, like Google Android and Windows Phone, haven't been as widely adopted by businesses, so firms aren't as compelled to develop apps for them (yet). App development could be more difficult (and costly) since multiple phone manufacturers adapt the OS to devices with different hardware, screens and so forth, issues

which do not plague generations of Apple's iPhone/iPod Touch devices.

Mobile apps versus mobile sites

Stuart Wood, chief marketing officer at Torys LLP, notes that the firm will continue to maintain the app (iPhone only) it produced in 2010.

"We're comfortable with content-heavy marketing," Wood says of the business reasons for developing the app. "We write things like opinions on recent developments in law, and we're always experimenting with different ways of sharing that with our clients."

While Torys sees ever-larger amounts of web traffic coming from mobile devices, that traffic comes from many types of devices, so they're migrating development efforts to mobile versions of their website. "We experimented with a mobile site that looks like an app," Wood recalls. "We feel a lot is possible using a mobile version of our website that would make it easier for us to stay current with whatever devices are popular."

While they may be easier to develop and maintain, mobile websites don't take full advantage of smartphone hardware. (GPS, for instance, could guide people to a firm's office in an unfamiliar city.)

Also, site traffic could diminish, according to Panvista data that suggests smartphone owners return to apps more often than they do to websites, and linger longer while they're there.

What clients want

What does a firm shoehorn into a smartphone app? Things that clients, prospective clients, recruits and referral sources want, like:

- bulletins;
- recent developments;
- video podcasts; and
- lawyer profiles (with links that trigger the phone's email and phone applications).

Sameer Dhargalkar admits that even Norton Rose lawyers use its recently released app to look up colleagues elsewhere in the world. "It starts up quickly, and they always have their phones on them," says the director of business development for Norton Rose OR LLP. "It's convenient."

To improve the likelihood that smartphone users will read a firm's new content:

- apps can let people choose what to download (e.g. content pertaining to certain practice areas, or published by specific lawyers or offices); and
- "app alerts" can show the number of new items waiting to be read within an app, and may exert the same psychological tug on smartphone owners as unread message counts

What does an app cost to build?

Some businesses view app development as a one-time effort. Others work with developers on a

subscription basis. Clients get ongoing maintenance, support and any changes necessitated by OS updates for a monthly fee.

Dhargalkar says Norton Rose, a Panvista client, chose the second route so it could budget for and future-proof the app.

Neither Wood nor Dhargalkar would share costs associated with their firms' apps (though Wood claims "it was not expensive").

Integrating apps into a firm's digital marketing strategy

Robinson recommends firms set up digital marketing tools so they need only post content in one place to have it appear on all web properties (e.g. regular web site, mobile-optimized site, smartphone apps) rather than having to post once per platform.

If your firm doesn't have an app but does publish its website using a content management platform like WordPress, you can find plugins that publish your site in smartphone-friendly formats.

Future of law firm apps

The Law Firm Mobile blog documents emerging and potential trends in mobile apps from law firms. Here are a few to watch for:

- Apps can further both knowledge management and business development. Consider the various "Books of Jargon™" from U.S. firm Latham & Watkins LLP, a series of quick-loading reference "books" on Corporate and Bank Finance, Project Finance and European Capital Markets and Bank Finance.
- Firms may create an app specific to a client that both sides can use to better collaborate on matters.
- Tablets like Apple's iPad and RIM's BlackBerry PlayBook offer richer environments than smartphones, so tablet apps may be on the horizon. ■

Law firms work on welcoming, accepting LGBT lawyers

DONALEE MOULTON

These days employee diversity is key to a successful business. Law firms are not interested in perpetuating the stereotype that they are filled to the gills with white, straight males. Firms are making efforts to make sure lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) lawyers and staff are welcomed and supported.

It's not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do. Creating a respectful workplace attracts and retains both clients and lawyers.

"Diversity has been on the TV screens of most of the law firms," said Orysia Semotiuk, a partner in

McCarthy Tétrault LLP's business law group in Toronto. "For the second year running, diversity has been named one of [our] firm's four priorities."

Just how important diversity—and LGBT personnel—are to the firm was evident earlier this summer when it announced the launch of the McCarthy Tétrault Pride Network, believed to be the first such organization at a national law firm in Canada. There are five objectives said Semotiuk, who chairs the network.

One of those goals is to help with mentoring, professional development and retention. The network will also assist in business development and networking. Currently, the Pride Network is

identifying clients that might benefit from hearing more about what McCarthy Tétrault is doing in this area.

"[This] goes beyond the LGBT community. It shows respect for lawyers. It's nice to feel you work for a place that has a social consciousness," noted Catherine Watson, a partner with McInnes Cooper in Halifax.

To be successful as a lawyer, she added, "you have to be a good networker, which means you have to have good experiences with [clients]. That means you have to be open about who you are."

Respect for diversity was a factor in Watson joining McInnes Cooper. She asked, for example, about the benefits for LGBT law-

yers and if these were equal to those for other lawyers. She also inquired about the level of support given back to the community by the firm.

That support has gladly grown with Watson's arrival. Earlier this year the firm sponsored a Pride fundraiser, the Fancy Gay Dress Party. "McInnes Cooper upped the ante," said Watson. "They flew in all the LGBT lawyers from around the region. That's great for morale. It shows the firm values diversity."

Amy Sakalauska, a lawyer with the Nova Scotia Department of Justice and vice-chair of the Canadian Bar Association's Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Conference, pointed out that it is important for firms to promote

the idea of a successful workplace and demonstrate the commitment. "One thing law firms can do when they're recruiting, for example, is state that they value diversity and list the organizations they support. Making an effort to support LGBT initiatives would definitely put applicants at ease. A zero-tolerance policy for discrimination is also important."

Sakalauska, who serves on the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society's Gender Equity Committee, noted that younger lawyers are asking questions about the type of law firm that is recruiting them. "Being involved in the community for traditionally marginalized groups is helpful. Reach out to law schools

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