

by Matt Sonnhalter
SPECIAL TO CONTRACTOR

Smartphone may be most important tool

In the not too distant future, the most important tool for a professional tradesman might not be his pipe wrench or power tool, but rather his smartphone. Some of the current mobile statistics are incredible.

According to Gartner/Morgan Stanley, it is predicted that mobile will be the "first screen" for all Web usage sometime between 2013 and 2015, which means mobile devices will overtake PCs. And today there are more than 5.3 billion mobile subscriptions worldwide, according to the International Telecommunications Union, more than the combined penetration of PCs, landlines and TVs. Fifty percent of American adults own a smartphone as of February 2012, according to CTIA, an international nonprofit trade association that has represented the wireless communication industry since 1984. According to Pew Research Center, 29% of U.S. adults own a tablet/eReader as of January 2012. The mobile stats keep increasing!

There also continues to be tremendous growth in pretty much all aspects of mobile marketing. According to ABI Research, revenues from mobile apps will reach \$46 billion by 2016. According to the Millennial Media Study, mobile video views increased 958% from Q2 2011 to Q1 2012. And according to ScanLife, 20 million QR code scans were recorded alone in Q3 2011 — a 440% increase year-over-year. Plus, almost 40 million U.S. mobile users access social media sites daily, according to comScore.

Your toolbox

So why is mobile relevant for the professional tradesman? Smartphones are an integral part of today's professional tradesman toolbox. These guys are always on the go, on the jobsite and in the field. Contractors need to be able to access relevant information whenever and from wherever they want, whether that is the latest news from leading trade publications or the latest product information from a manufacturer.

There are many relevant areas of mobile for the professional tradesman from "consumption" (gathering information and knowledge relevant to their job) to marketing (for those tradesmen who are using mobile to help promote their business).

From the consumption side there are many areas where mobile can help a contractor gather relevant

information on the products and services they use every day for their job. More and more companies are developing mobile-specific sites or at a bare minimum optimizing their current site for the mobile environment.

A recent example would include Grainger's new mobile website, which provides their customers with another option for researching products, checking availability, placing orders and tracking shipments for the over half a million products they stock. Another example would be this magazine you are reading. Contractor magazine has a mobile version of their site, m.contractormag.com, where you can access the latest industry news from the palm of your hand.

Another hot area which continues to grow is mobile apps. There are a number of relevant apps for the contractor. You can search on the Android mobile app marketplace Google Play, Apple's App Store or your smartphone's store to see the plethora of relevant apps already out in the market.

Manufacturers, distributors: Many manufacturers, such as Em-

number of existing apps for relevant plumbing calculations, estimating and guidelines. One example is the Plumbing Systems Design Tables app, created by the American Society of Plumbing Engineers, which offers in one convenient place all of the equations, pipe sizing data, and background information that you need to successfully complete plumbing system design and installation projects. The app includes applicable data and information from the major plumbing codes and standards used throughout the U.S., including the International Plumbing Code, Uniform Plumbing Code, and National Standard Plumbing Code.

Another example is the NKBA app, which provides kitchen and bathroom planning guidelines with access standards. It features 31 searchable guidelines for kitchens and 27 guidelines for bathrooms, featuring plans, sections, and perspective views to planning recommendations and code references and requirements.

Plumbing contractors can also utilize mobile to help market their own company to their customers. And I've got news for you, if your company has a website; you are al-

These apps can provide valuable information for their customers, such as latest specials and promotions, hours of operation, contact information, etc.

erson, Kohler and Viega, have their own branded app providing relevant product and/or diagnostic information, how-to videos, productivity tools and troubleshooting tips for their products. Check out your smartphone's app store and search for some of the manufacturer brands you currently use ... I think you will be surprised at what you find.

Coming off their new mobile website, Grainger has also recently introduced a mobile app which makes it easy to search for products, see account pricing, check product availability and quickly order products. Other plumbing/HVAC distributors have their own apps for nearest location and contact information, such as Ferguson and Johnstone Supply.

Online forums: There are a number of professional contractor online forum and communities which have their own dedicated app.

Utility/Productivity: Today this area probably has the greatest

ready playing in the mobile space! So how can you make sure your brand and company are represented well? Below are two areas to help get you started with mobile marketing.

Optimize for mobile


Make sure all your Web content is "optimized" for the mobile environment. You need to ensure your look-and-feel fits the smaller size requirements (e.g. easy to read text; no Flash; images that load quickly), but you also have to make sure your content is transformed into quick, bite-sized units (e.g. 100-200 words) and easy-to-digest formats (e.g. audio podcasts and/or video). If you want to see how your current website looks on a mobile device, check out the Interactive Advertising Bureau's (IAB) "Tap Into Mobile" site (<http://www.iab.net/mobilecenter/tap-into-mobile>). This site provides tools for businesses to improve their mobile presence.

Integrate

Before you run out and develop a completely separate mobile marketing strategy and plan, take a look at your existing marketing programs and determine how you can start integrating mobile components. You should consider QR codes on print or collateral pieces. Please note: if you are going to utilize QR Codes, please be aware the end user is going to be viewing items on their smartphone. Content needs to be optimized and relevant for this environment. You should not just be sending people to your normal website (unless you have a mobile version of your site). You should also consider optimizing e-newsletters so they are legible on mobile devices. Realize that more and more people are utilizing their smartphones for "local" search. So what, if anything, are you doing to ensure your company is showing up in these search results?

It's also important for you to note that a number of local plumbing contractors have created apps for their own company. These apps can provide valuable information for their customers such as latest specials and promotions, hours of operation, relevant contact information and the ability to call and/or schedule an appointment. I would suggest doing a search within your smartphone's app store to see examples of what local contractor firms in your area are doing and spark some ideas for your own app.

The mobile environment seems to be changing daily, so here are some other resources to help keep you up-to-date on mobile trends: Mobile Marketing Association, <http://www.mmaglobal.com/>. This website has great tips, trends and case studies.

Another resource is 360i's Mobile Marketing Playbook, <http://blog.360i.com/pov/mobile-marketing-playbook>, which includes a wealth of knowledge and is a great resource for overall planning in mobile marketing as well as the top mobile marketing tools and tactics. 

Matt Sonnhalter is president and vision architect at Sonnhalter. He has more than 20 years of consumer and business-to-business experience including product launches, brand positioning and development of marketing plans. Sonnhalter is the leading B2B, business-to-tradesmen, marketing communications firm to companies that target professional tradesmen in the construction, industrial and MRO markets.