



## MARKETING the LAW FIRM

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### Mobile Marketing

*Should Your Firm Develop an App for That?*

By [J. David Harvey](#)

In the era of the iPhone, iPad, and Android phones, mobile device use is exploding. In fact, Gartner (the information technology research and advisory firm headquartered in Stamford, CT) predicts that mobile phones will surpass PCs this year as the most common way to access the Internet. For legal marketers, that means new challenges in providing content that is easily accessible through these devices and at a level of quality consistent with our website efforts. Of course, mobile apps have opened up an entirely new channel in which to engage clients. Is your firm ready for "planet of the apps?"

#### Walk Before You Run

Before you consider whether or not your firm needs an app, test the current user experience of your customers/prospects by accessing your website from a mobile device. Download your website from your mobile device. If you're not able to read attorney bios from your device, for example, your user experience is already sub-optimal. There are many ways to provide a better mobile experience for your clients. Developers can create a "Mobi" version of your website; this is a mobile-friendly version that appears on any hand-held mobile device that has a web browser. Typically, it is a stripped-down version of your site, including the basics such as attorney bios, locations, and news headlines. A number of firms are always developing "responsive" websites that automatically adjust to fit the site of the viewing screen. This is a more expensive option but ensures a seamless client experience.

#### Multiple Platforms to Consider

Once you've determined that your website is optimized for mobile viewing, you can consider the advantages/disadvantages of developing an app. Complicating this decision is that fact that there are three main platforms to consider: Apple's iOS platform (apps will run on iPhone, iTouch and iPad

devices), the Blackberry platform, and Google's Android operating system. Unfortunately, these are not compatible systems so that you will incur basically the same development costs for an app developed on each of the three platforms. Which one to start with? If any of the big three is already a client, that makes your decision easier as you now have a client relations benefit to producing the app, in addition to the marketing and public relations benefits. If not, the decision is more difficult as each platform has its pros and cons.

Although much of corporate America uses Blackberrys, the company's share of available apps is quite small, and downloading apps onto a Blackberry is blocked by many corporate IT departments. So for most of us, the decision is between Apple's "walled" system or Google's open-source Android platform. Apple maintains strict quality standards through its approval process and has higher development costs than the Android platform. Android may have the most appeal for the "hardcore" geek crowd, though the iPhone and iPad tend to be devices of choice for the older, professional set. A flash survey of apps developed by law firms thus far reveals that more than 70% are iOS-supported, but if speed and cost are paramount, consider Android. If you are more concerned about quality and have a healthier budget, I recommend developing on the Apple platform — be sure your developer has prior experience with it though.

### **Do We Really Need an App For That?**

Some argue that with more than 1.6 million apps already developed, why develop something clients are not even asking for? True, law firms are not going to develop Angry Bird apps that generate millions of downloads. Still, for existing and prospective clients, there is value in having another real touch point with your firm. And do you want to focus your time on the desktop when we are rapidly moving to a mobile world?

At Morrison & Foerster, we launched our first app, MoFo2Go, in March 2010. It's a multifunction app and once downloaded, a user is just two touches away from being able to call any of our 1,000 attorneys. Clients might spend downtime in an airport or on a subway train catching up on important legal developments through the news feed we include on our app. Our firm is known as one that "gets tech," and tech clients comprise a significant share of our client base. For us, it was important to be among the first out with an iPhone app. As Hellerman Baretz partner and co-founder, John Hellerman, has stated, It's about "living your brand." Would developing an app be in keeping with your firm's identity? That's an important question to consider.

### **Feature Set Considerations**

If you've decided an app does make sense for your firm, you need to consider what type of app to develop and what content to include. The simplest and least expensive is going to be a single -unction app. Arnold & Porter developed this type of iPhone app for its Consumer Law Blog. The main difference between this format and receiving the information via RSS feed is simple convenience.

Morrison & Foerster and Torys are two firms that developed multi-functional apps. Though they were developed independently, there is a lot of overlap in the feature set. Both include a full "people" and "news" section. Torys incorporated its Twitter feed into the app. At MoFo, we decided to include a "game" function on the app because we felt that it was more in keeping with the experience of iPhone users. That's not a function found on our website. The point is to think about content or functions that

will keep the user coming back for more. That might also include blogs, video, or other content that users would expect to view from their mobile devices.

Other important considerations are: Would the app save people time, help with collaboration, or educate? Latham & Watkins developed a reference app for M&A terminology. That type of app educates, saves times, and is consistent with the firm's brand. Because it is a "single-purpose" app, it is also cheaper and faster to build than those with multi-functions. The trend in the past two years among law firms has definitely been to develop single function apps.

## **Conclusion**

For legal marketers, providing content that is geared to a mobile user is a new and daunting challenge. We have much to learn from those companies that have a consumer orientation, but need to tailor our offerings for our specific client base consistent with our firm's brand. If you've been concerned that your legal marketing position hasn't tapped your creativity enough, here's your chance. The world of apps requires all the creativity we, as legal marketers, can muster.

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