

Apps Proliferate, But How Do Users Engage?

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The top 50 apps took up 54% of users'™ time

The mobile web and apps are like parallel highways, with distinct rules and scenery and their own versions of congestion and confusion. "The day may come when HTML5 matures to the point that the experience of using a web app differs little from a native app," said Noah Elkin, eMarketer senior analyst and author of the new report "App-etite for Engagement: Marketing Beyond the Browser." "Ultimately, however, focusing on the underlying technology in part misses the point about what makes apps popular."

App users are drawn to the encapsulated experience that improves content delivery and draws on the hardware features of smart devices. "Consumer response in terms of adoption and use of apps is a testament to their importance within the marketing ecosystem and the central role they can play when it comes to ongoing engagement," said Elkin.

According to Nielsen, US Android and iOS app users spent 101 billion minutes per month with their apps in March 2012, more than double the amount from a year earlier. By contrast, the amount of time spent with mobile websites grew at a more modest 44% over the same span.

Still, apps are no different than other media: The options keep proliferating but the amount of time available in a given day remains the same. Consequently, consumers'™ attentions are further divided, and they respond by devoting more time to certain apps. Overall, the top 50 apps ate up 58% of US users'™ app time, Nielsen determined. On the other hand, that figure was down from 74% in 2011, indicating there are opportunities for new apps to capture consumers'™ attention.

For marketers who want to engage a mobile audience and are deciding between a mobile-enabled site or an app, the essential issue they confront is "what role apps can play within the broader marketing ecosystem and [in terms of] customers'™ interaction with the brand," said Elkin.

"Ultimately, any mobile device with a browser is able to access the web, meaning a mobile site (or even a web-based mobile app) has the ability to reach the largest potential audience," said Elkin. "What this means is for most companies currently using legacy platforms ... mobile sites and apps will serve complementary rather than exclusive functions."

The full report, "App-etite for Engagement: Marketing Beyond the Browser," also answers these key questions:

- What forces are driving the app economy's™ growth?
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- What lessons can brand marketers draw from the success of mobile-first companies?
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- What steps are brands taking to successfully market their apps?

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