

HOW TO CREATE
A MOBILE SERVICE
FOR TRAVELERS
(TIPS AND TRICKS)

Who Should Read This

Travel and Mobile

With advent of iPhone and netbooks, traveling with mobile devices has become easier and much more pleasant. Business people on the trips and students traveling around the world strive to have access to information especially when everything is in language which is hard to understand.

Businessmen and businesswomen, students, tourists are all the best of audience for those who want to make money on mobile services. Mobile services are on the rise, and really useful mobile services for travelers like TripIt, ArrivedOK, Localyte have started to appear, attracting millions of people on the go.

But mobile services for travelers suffer from many problems. There are the most common Internet/Start-up diseases like "how to monetize traffic" but there are also many specific questions related to the medium (mobile phone), travel (access, configuration), user experience (simplicity), and pricing (roaming charges turning people off).

If you provide or are going to provide mobile services, what should you know to pay attention to the right stuff? We have gathered the best of experience from specialists at Eyeline Communications -- the company which has been developing technology for mobile users all around the world.

If you are a service provider, tour operator, hotel, taxi, travel agency, booking agent, or you are this way or another related to travel, then this white paper is for you.

If you have questions, or would like to learn more, visit Eyeline at <http://eyeline.mobi>.

Money Matters

The Most Important Question

Of course you want to make money. We all do. This way or the other. But this very desire can ruin the whole thing. Because if you charge a lot and your customers were to lose a lot of money once, it would be especially hard to make them use any service again any time soon.

Money "in travel" is not only greater than money "at home" -- we prepare for unforeseen -- but it is also the most guarded asset. We don't want to buy mobile services which can suddenly take all of your money on the phone and there will be hard to top-up when you have to board the plane "Right Now!".

In decision whether to use a mobile service, travelers will most probably use Economics 101 reasoning: cost-benefit analysis. Is it worth paying \$100 to read New York Times on AT&T while climbing Altai Mountains in Siberia? Most probably, people will say "Nyet."

So what can be done to deal with this super sensitive issue?

Tips and Tricks

1) *Clearly state the cost of the service before people use it.*

The best way to manage money is to be aware of the costs before you buy something. Makes sense. Prepare people beforehand. Quite often than not, however, hidden fees or roaming charges are not taken into account -- "ask your operator about the costs". It would be VERY helpful and often cheap NOT to ask my operator at home while I am roaming in Bangladesh but instead be aware right there of the charges for the service I am about to use.

2) *Put people in control of the cost of the service.*

Interestingly enough, even though you may know the cost of the service, it could be difficult to calculate how much have you spent already. How many Megabytes has been this web page? How many clicks did I have? How much time did I spent online?

If you want your service to succeed, there should be an easy way to have people control the costs. Like a small display box in the corner which tells you the remaining balance or the cost you have incurred so far.

3) *Make it easy to top-up or recharge for the service to continue.*

Although credit cards have become universally accepted, but to go online to complete the transaction or to search for stand where you can add money to continue to use the service can be problematic in a crowded airport or on the way to your hotel. Therefore, you, as a creator or provider of the service should think of an easy way for your customer to add money. May be it will some m-payment system. May be you make sure people have enough balance when they prepare the trip at home. May be you provide the service on credit.

4) *Help people to save money.*

Since you want to take care of your customer and you have more time and resources than he or she on the stressful “go”, help them to manage their money efficiently. In other words, give them a choice. Usually there are several ways to provide the service so switch or offer the most economical one.

Optimization of spending may come as switching to USSD and SMS instead of expensive GPRS traffic or as a suggestion to get a local SIM card at that particular location.

5) *Reach people before they go.*

A lot of savings come from preparation. If possible, think of your service and extend it to people before they go on the trip. If you reach them at home, make sure they subscribe to the good data or travel plan, like those offered by US major carriers.

Device Matters

Your Little (Individualistic) Thing

That’s why we love those devices -- they are small, cute, and... different. But all those things combined make it difficult to have a uniform service. Screen sizes are never the same, operating systems differ, browsers differ, capabilities and menu structures are not in unison. Even button names are not the same.

It is paramount to have your service tailored to every particular phone, taking the most out of each device. For example, if it is an iPhone, it may make sense to suggest a WiFi alternative. If your phone supports 3G, it may make sense to use the speedy Internet highway given the cost does not matter.

But if you are like the majority of us -- with a “simple” (what is simple nowadays?) phone -- provide something basic that works on any phone. It is possible but may not be that “flashy”.

Tips and Tricks

1) *A KISS Service Only.*

There are restrictions given by the size and operability of devices. Your service should take into account. Since you are dealing with the littlest possible device -- your service should be the simplest possible. KISS (Keep It Simple, Stupid) should indeed be your guarding principle.

2) *Power, power, power!*

Another matter to watch for is battery. People on the go may have trouble recharging (different power plugs, voltage, trouble finding a socket). GPRS and GPS eat a lot of battery so it would be good to avoid those if other information channels are a good enough alternative.

3) *Avoid automatic upgrades.*

Many devices like iPhone or your netbook when you use them at home have all the settings ON for automatic upgrades. This can lead to megabytes of data download without the customer even noticing it. If it is possible warn your customers or use alternative routes to information.

Experience Matters

User Experience

Most probably you will reach tech-savvy crowd. They love everything new especially when they have time between the flights. But money comes from the mass audience, from people who, in their majority, know only how to make a call. Another service which has been much adopted is SMS. Internet browsing may be yet too difficult for people to use!

Tips and Tricks

1) *Don't Impose But Propose.*

You can't just assume (making an "ass" of "u" and "me") that everyone knows how to use GPRS or WiFi or 3G. If you want to reach a mass market, you have to give people options to use the service through voice, SMS, USSD, Java, Internet.

2) *Use the simplest, upgrade gradually.*

Make people enter the service through the simplest route. Get them comfortable there. Propose shifting to a more sophisticated mode. For example, enter the service through a phone call. Interact through SMS or voice. Give instructions how to use Internet.

3) *Teach and Educate.*

True education means quality specialists designing your teaching module. Do it. Really, it will pay off.

Mobile technology is still very new to people. They don't know how to use the phone but to dial a number or send an SMS.

See the stats about adoption of complicated mobile technologies here:

<http://www.fiercewireless.com/press-releases/npd-group-nearly-half-mobile-phone-users-eschew-multimedia-features-and-use-handsets->

If you want to give users something sophisticated you need to teach users in a private school with quality teachers. Otherwise, frustration with teaching and complexity of real life will kill their attempts to make you richer.

Traffic Matters

Service vs. Mobile Operators

You have to be clear that your goals as a service provider are different from the goals of mobile operators. The latter really care about traffic and profit. Because they sell traffic. (Another issue is the approval process -- especially taking into account multiple operators in every country and the number of countries as well.)

You may want to provide a free service because your goal is to attract visitors to your hotel. Or you may use mobile to advertise to travelers a local attraction. Beware that you will have to pay for that but most likely your customers will pay for that as well.

Tips and Tricks

1) *Research your options if you want to provide a free service.*

Some companies offer a solution that gives your audience a free service. It is important because FREE is the most likely adopted mode of operation at this time. But free may include valuable offers from those who cater to travelers.

If you decide on using GPRS your users may end up paying huge (e.g. \$20/Mb for regular AT&T) mobile bills.

2) *Help your customers to use less traffic.*

If your goal is not traffic or if you want to nurture your audience before you harvest, you may want to help your customers to use less traffic by switching them to SMS (which can still be expensive overseas) or USSD (which is free in roaming!).

3) *Create offline content.*

While the user is at home, let him download an application which can be used offline, like a travel guide or a dictionary.

4) *Teach to swap SIM cards.*

Although people are aware of local SIM cards which drastically reduce one's expenses, it can be hard to obtain them if you don't speak, for example, Chinese or Russian. A how-to guide would be very helpful -- for instance when you arrive in China, even before the border control, you can purchase an inexpensive local SIM card from a Ch-English speaking girl.

Summary

Whatever your mobile travel service is, at the end of the day it will be used if:

- 1) **It's inexpensive or free**
- 2) **It clearly states, monitors, and optimizes the costs involved**
- 3) **It is easy to top-up (credit card, SMS, vouchers, m-payment)**
- 4) **It is optimized for mobile Internet (simple, eats little bandwidth and traffic)**
- 5) **It is simple as 1-2-3 and it is easy to learn (employ the best experts for it)**
- 6) **It is offered through all possible delivery channels (SMS, USSD, Java, WAP, WiFi)**
- 7) **It is also provided before the travel begins (to educate, add the balance, test the phone, configure offline use)**

In any case, start with small, preferably inexpensive and SMS- or USSD-driven services. You can always complicate and offer as an option of more sophisticated things later.

Contact us for more information on mobile service optimization for travel at info@eyeline.mobi.

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