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growing among mobile users that they should be able to do anything and communicate with anyone (including your firm) from the convenience of applications on their mobile devices.

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We live in a mobile world that is becoming increasingly so every day. Expectations

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However, the interest and level of discussion is growing. While a mobile app can be a costly initiative (especially if you haven't done your up-front planning), it can also be an excellent differentiator for your firm. And it is going to become more important as your client base becomes more dependent on their mobile devices and their expectations start to include the ability to easily interact with your firm through those devices. Before you make the decision to pursue a mobile app though, there are a number of questions you need to ask yourself first.

## Important Questions

The ultimate goal of the list of questions below is to ensure that you have clear objectives for your mobile app initiative and a plan/budget for meeting those objectives.

- ***What is the purpose? What need are you filling?*** – Start by asking yourself the purpose of the app you want to develop and be weary of scope creep. All successful mobile apps address a pain point and make completing a task or set of tasks more convenient for the end user. So start by identifying the need you are trying to fill. If you are thinking of providing information that is already on your public website, you probably need to keep exploring the purpose.
- ***Who is your audience?*** – Will your app be client facing, internally focused or both? Knowing the answer to this question will impact not only the purpose but also the amount of time and money you are willing to invest into the project.
- ***What is your budget?*** Understanding the amount of time and money you are willing to spend on a mobile app is very important to determine on the front end.
- ***Native vs. Browser-Based App?*** – There is a difference between developing a mobile app that can be downloaded in one of the app stores and creating one that adjusts formatting when viewed on a mobile device's browser. As with anything, there are pros and cons to each but you'll want to make this determination early in the project.

- **Which devices will you develop for and will you list in the app stores?** – Will the

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...time needed for the end user, you will probably want to explore custom

development. This will require that you either hire in-house developers or source the project to a 3<sup>rd</sup> party. This approach tends to come with a higher price tag.

2. **App Builder Tools** – If you want to provide some relatively basic and standard functions, there a number of pre-built tools out there that can get you up and running with very little time or money invested in the project.

3. **Existing Software Vendors** – Do your current software vendors already have apps to accomplish the purpose you've set forth and do they offer white-label options? If so, this is definitely the easiest and least costly option.

- **What is your Quality Assurance Process?** – Having measurements outlined and a process for ensuring that the end-product meets your success criteria is something you should outline prior to starting instead of making it an afterthought.

## Getting Started

The first step in the process is to ensure that mobile app development is a priority in terms of strategic initiatives for your firm. If not, it won't get the attention it needs and it may drag on endlessly. Next, start your exploration with the easy solutions – apps from your existing software vendors and app builder tools. If neither meets your needs, then you'll want to look into the custom development route.

What you don't want to do is turn a blind eye to this trend. There will be significant and rapid developments over the coming years as more firms develop their own apps and software vendors continue to progress on executing their mobile strategies. It won't be long before mobile apps are no longer a differentiator but rather an expectation. Don't get left behind and start developing your mobile strategy today.

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