

A dark grey smartphone frame with a white camera lens at the top center. The screen is blue and contains the title and subtitle.

Appetite

Research into employees'
attitudes to work-related apps



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Foreword



Katie Macaulay

Katie is managing director of AB, the award-winning employee communications agency. She is responsible for business growth and development, consultancy and senior account management. In 2014, she published *From Cascade to Conversation – Unlocking the Collective Wisdom of Your Workforce* and is passionate about translating business strategy into practical, engaging communication that delivers results. She has led consultancy projects with Novartis, Royal Mail, Roche, Post Office, Ofsted, EDF Energy and the Dutch banking group, Rabobank.

The first software applications – apps – for mobile devices appeared in 2008. In less than a decade they have become an all-pervasive feature of our everyday lives.

Studies indicate we check our devices 85 times a day on average – at work, home, on holiday and especially when travelling. Relaxing on our sofas we now practice two-screen viewing – watching one screen, while searching and scrolling on another.

The implications for internal communicators are obvious. In a world full of noisy distractions, we must cut through the commotion. We must publish fun, informative content on the devices our audiences hold most dear.

Thankfully, we have a wealth of good practice to draw on. There are two million apps in Apple's App Store – a treasure trove of information on what to build and, crucially, what not to build.

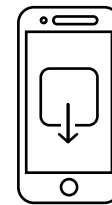
This research report is aimed at internal communicators who love learning from the best. It is particularly aimed at organisations that do not give their employees smart devices and are therefore grappling with the question of whether people would download an IC app to their own phones.

We asked the public what makes our favourite apps so unputdownable. We then applied these insights to our world, asking and answering a key question: What can internal communicators learn from people's everyday app behaviour?

The result, I hope, is a valuable guide to building better apps for your workforce.

Katie Macaulay
Managing director

Introduction



This isn't surprising. A study shows that 75 billion apps were downloaded to iOS and Android devices in 2015

Apps are a hot topic in employee communications.

Organisations large and small are pondering their potential benefits, leading to a host of questions about features, security and, of course, cost.

Apps have become integrated into our daily lives, bringing an enticing mix of information and entertainment to life in the palm of our hands. Mobile has prompted a new style of content – fresher, richer and more interactive.

At AB, we believe that for too long internal communication has been the poor relation to mainstream media. We aim to create work-related content every bit as engaging as the content people choose to consume in their personal lives.

To do this, we wanted to look more closely at the appeal of our favourite applications. We researched the views of more than 400 people to find out how they use apps in everyday life. Knowing how, when and why people engage with their preferred applications provides valuable insight we can bring to the table when considering the future of workplace apps.

In short, these insights are intended to both inform and inspire internal communicators, particularly those keen to explore the potential of an enterprise app downloadable to personal devices.

Methodology

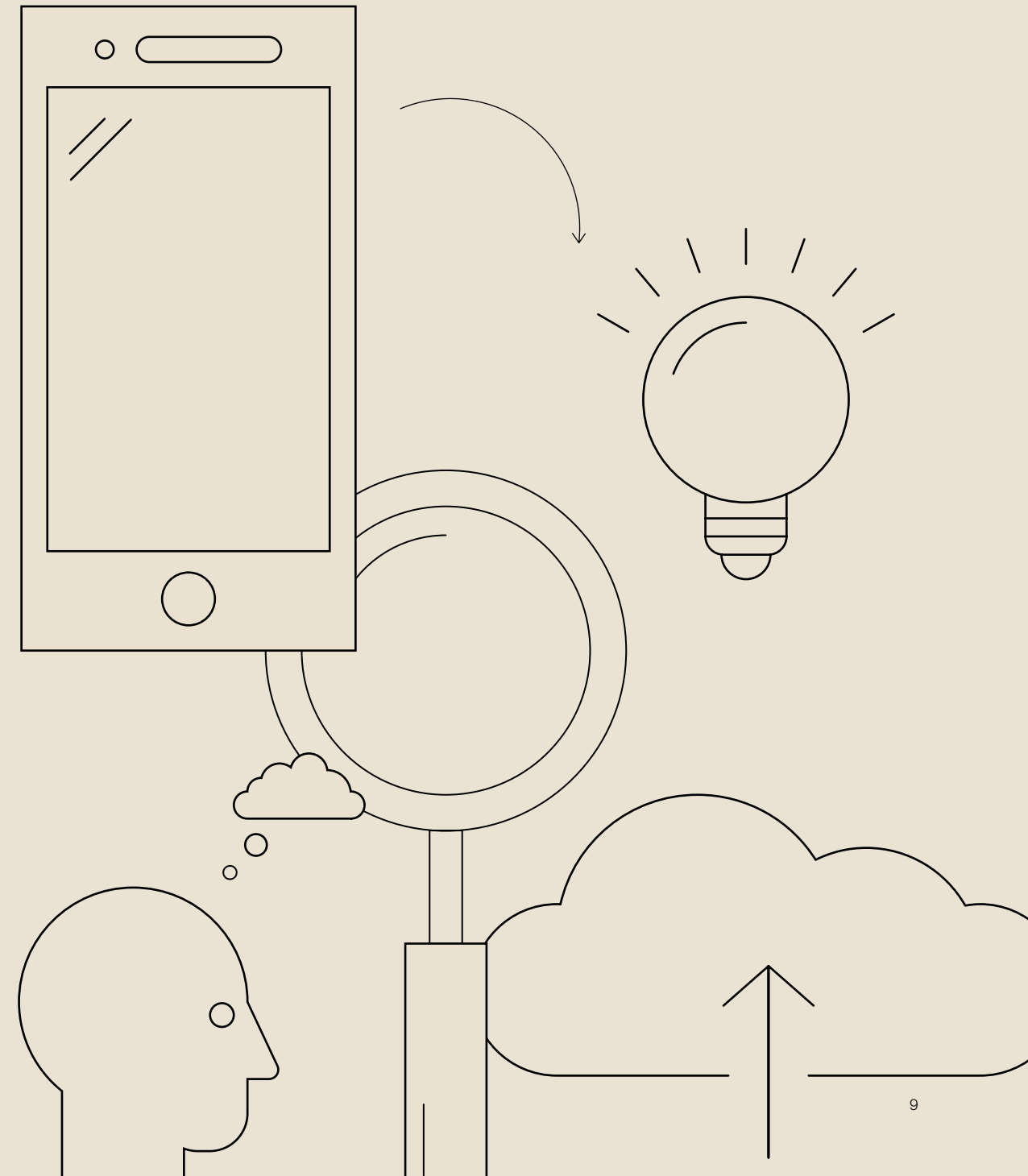
The demand for applications to deliver IC content is growing. The advantages of delivering content directly into the hands of our employees are obvious – speed, interactivity, superior analytics and the opportunity to deliver rich, multi-media content to devices often more superior than those provided by their organisation – if devices are provided at all.

But it pays to be cautious. Developing an IC app is challenging. Aside from the technical and budgetary hurdles, there is the wider question of what will engage users. Your IC app will be competing with plenty of others. When your employees pick up their smartphones, what will entice them to open your app rather than Facebook or Twitter?

This research examines how and why people use their favourite apps and considers what lessons internal communicators can learn from this behaviour when designing their own applications.

We created an online survey designed for people of all ages and shared it widely through social media channels and other websites. The result was more than 400 responses from across the country.

Findings



Demographics

Participants in the research were diverse – they covered all regions, age groups and both genders. Over 76% of respondents work currently. Just under 40% are office-based. A quarter work but not in an office environment. The remaining 12% are a mix of both.

GENDER



Male
45.8%

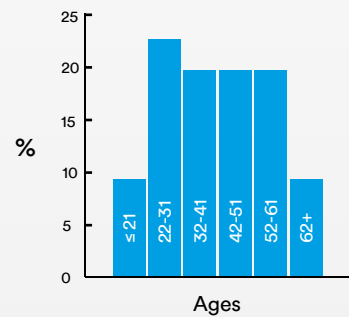


Female
53.4%



Prefer not to say
0.8%

AGE



21 and under: 9.2%
 22-31: 22.6%
 32-41: 19.6%
 42-51: 19.6%
 52-61: 19.8%
 62+: 9.2%

LOCATIONS



IF YOU WORK, ARE YOU MAINLY OFFICE-BASED?

Yes: 39.3%
 No: 24.8%

A mix of both: 12.5%
 I don't work: 23.5%
 You are less likely to be office based if you are 21 and under, or 62 and over. Also, most of those based in London (61%), Northern Ireland (71%) and the South East (56%) were office-based.

What devices do you own?

Our research suggests it is vital that an IC app is compatible for both Apple and Android devices. If not, you run the risk of marginalising a significant percentage of your workforce.



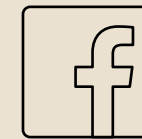
Most regions have a preference for an iPhone, except West Midlands, North East, Scotland and Wales, where Android is the device of choice.

It was clear that older respondents are less likely to have an iPhone than those that are younger. Apple phones are most popular with those aged 32-41 (78%), while only 28% of those aged 62 and over chose an Apple phone. Android phones are the preference for this age group (45%), and also for those aged 42-51 (48%) and 52-61 (53%).

Interestingly, those aged 21 and over are also slightly more likely to own an Android phone (53%) than an Apple phone (42%). Those aged between 22 and 41 have a strong preference for Apple phones – an average of 74% have an iPhone compared to 30% who have an Android phone.

What apps do you use most often?

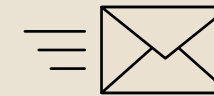
We asked participants to select the top three apps they use most often. Their top apps all have a strong **social element**.



Facebook (62%)



Messages/Whatsapp/
Facebook messenger
(56%)



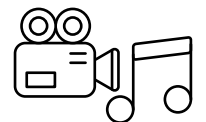
Mail/Outlook (38%)



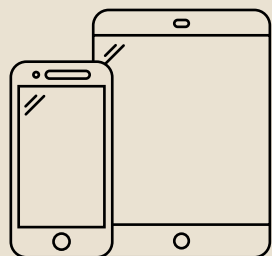
When asked why people use these apps, by far the most popular answer (50%) is for social reasons.

“Because they're the most social and I have different groups of friends for different interests.”

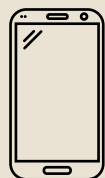
“Messenger is the default contact on my phone so I can keep in contact with everyone in one place.”



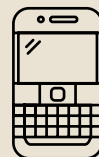
The joint second reason people use these apps relate to their ease of use and entertainment value.



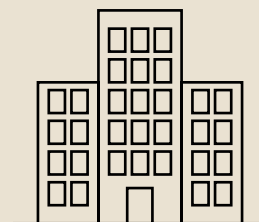
Just over half of respondents (54%) own an Apple phone and 41% have an Apple iPad.



Just over 40% own an Android phone – the same percentage as those who own an Apple iPad.



Only 6% of respondents own a Blackberry.

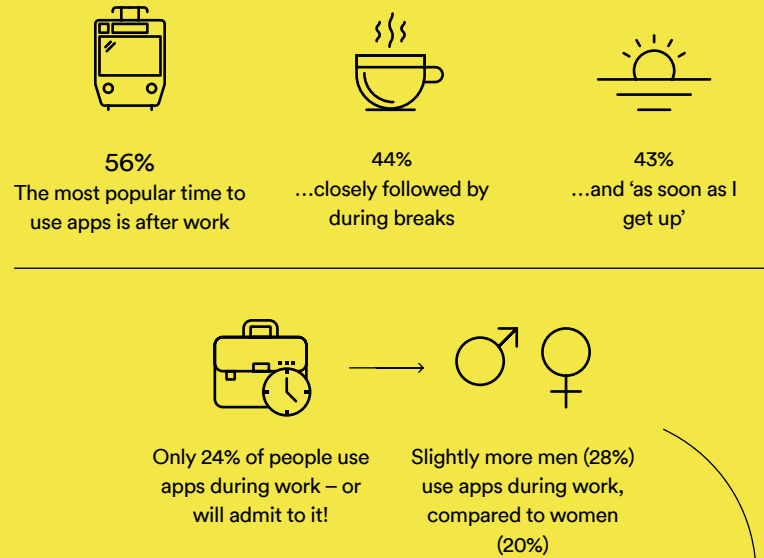


People who are office-based own more devices – 63% own an Apple phone, 48% an iPad and 11% a Blackberry. Android phones are slightly less popular in this group.



When analysed by age, there is a clear generational split. Those aged 41 and under have a preference for messaging apps. Those aged 42 and over are much more likely to be using Facebook.

During a typical working day, when do you most use apps?



This is useful data when considering when to publish content updates, notifications and alerts. Scheduling notifications and updates for the start or end of a shift, or for breaks, could be essential to your app's success.



HOW DO YOU FIND OUT WHICH APPS TO DOWNLOAD?



Over half of all respondents hear about new apps through recommendation and word of mouth.



For internal communicators, this suggests an effective launch campaign, coupled with a network of champions or advocates, will spread the word about your new app across your organisation.



Ideally, you should engage your champions early in the process by asking them to test a prototype. Involving a group of employees in the design, build and testing of your app is an ideal way to create ambassadors for your final product.

OTHER FEATURES IMPORTANT IN AN APP?



Makes my life easier i.e. does something useful 7.8



Attractive design 6.7



Useful notifications 6.4

What features are important in an app?

We asked respondents to rank the importance of seven common application features, using a scale of 1 to 10. This gave us an average score for each feature, allowing us to make comparisons between them.

All features scored above five, which reassured us – we had listed the features that mattered.

'Ease of use' came top with a score of 8.1 – the only feature to score over 8. This was followed by 'makes my life easier' i.e. it does something useful' which scored 7.8.

The ability to personalise content ranked highly. It is therefore worth considering how your employees might like to filter content based on their region, role, function or interest group.



Ability to personalise content scored 6.3



Incentives e.g. prizes or points 5.4

Incentives scored lowest but still above five, suggesting they are worthy of consideration. With an employee app, incentives may be more important still – employees may need added encouragement to download your app and open it regularly. Incentives come in various guises from a 'top user' leaderboard, to weekly offers, discounts and competitions.



Apps being updated regularly scored 6.9, suggesting not only that it's relatively low on user's expectations but also that it may even have a negative effect if things change too often.

Regular updates that change the user experience often annoy us. As one participant wrote: "An app needs to be easy to use, that's really important. So many apps keep updating their designs just as soon as you've worked out the previous version." This is likely to be especially true for a less tech-savvy workforce.

Why would you delete an app?

Respondents were given six potential reasons for deleting an app and asked to choose as many as appropriate. Almost half of respondents ticked five of the six options, suggesting there are many reasons we give apps the elbow.

The top reason is the app failed to deliver. Almost 60% of us delete an app because it falls short of our expectations. This suggests the features and benefits of your IC app must be clear and genuine. Over-promising is dangerous.

Storage is a concern for nearly half of all respondents, suggesting when building an app it should be designed to use as little storage capacity as possible. As useful as your app may be, you do not want it to be bumped to make space for the latest version of Candy Crush.



This is of biggest concern to those aged 22-31, with 61% of respondents in this age group selecting this answer

WHY WOULD YOU DELETE AN APP?

- It didn't do what I thought it would (58%)
- I haven't used it in a while (55%)
- I ran out of storage (46%)
- The content is not good enough (45%)
- It's not kept up to date (20%)



55% of those studied said they would delete an app that they deemed no longer relevant

More than half of us delete an app because it is **no longer relevant**. This suggests we are happy to use an app on a short-term basis when a specific need arises.

We do not keep apps in the hope they will become useful later. If we have not used an app for a while, we do not hesitate to **delete it**.

Therefore, once you have successfully encouraged employees to download your IC app, you have only a short window of opportunity to ensure it is used.

Your app must **offer something useful** and, ideally, entertaining. Encouraging users to engage with your app guards against its deletion.



According to a recent study, 97% of apps are deleted within a month of being downloaded



45% of people said they would delete an app if they thought content was not good enough



Our research suggests we are rather mercenary in our use of apps. We are unlikely to give an app a second chance or wait for it to improve. We want what was promised. Anything less and we remove it.

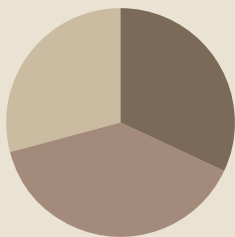
Would you download a work app on your personal phone?

Yes: 44%
Maybe: 24%
No: 32%

We were not surprised to see answers vary dramatically across age groups. Generally, older generations are far more likely to answer 'no'.

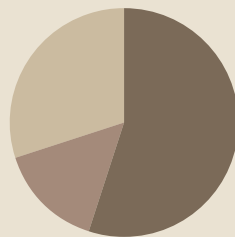


21 and under



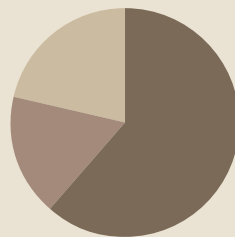
■ Yes: 32.1%
 ■ No: 39.3%
 ■ Maybe: 28.6%

22-31



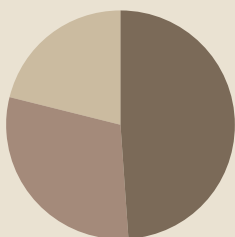
■ Yes: 54.7%
 ■ No: 15.1%
 ■ Maybe: 30.2%

32-41



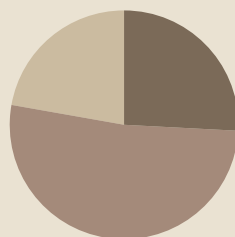
■ Yes: 61.4%
 ■ No: 17.1%
 ■ Maybe: 21.4%

42-51



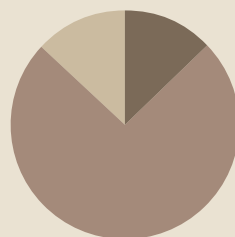
■ Yes: 49.3%
 ■ No: 29.6%
 ■ Maybe: 21.1%

52-61



■ Yes: 26.4%
 ■ No: 51.4%
 ■ Maybe: 22.2%

62+



■ Yes: 12.5%
 ■ No: 75%
 ■ Maybe: 12.5%

Those answering 'yes'

There are three key reasons we would download a work app to our own smart device.

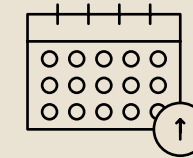


1. For a variety of practical and technological reasons, we like the idea of having a work-related app on our own device.

"I carry my personal phone more than my work phone. If the app is useful, I would want access to it as frequently as possible."

"They don't pay for me to have a work device so I need them on my personal device."

"Prefer my personal phone (iPhone) to my work phone (Android)."



2. To keep up-to-date when away from work.

"I like to keep up-to-date and see what's going on, so I don't feel left in the dark."

"A work app is a good idea. It would be beneficial on my way to the office – to hook in for general communication and info."

"I could check the latest work news and updates during my commute."

"So I can keep in touch with work things in my personal time."



3. Many respondents could envisage using an app for a specific task related to their day-to-day work.

"Would also be useful to confirm visitors that day and any transport problems – give the employees the info that they want."

"I use image editing apps to edit my work."

"Regarding training and holidays booked."



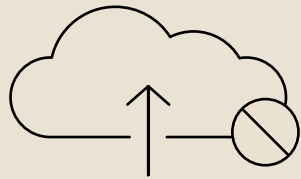
Our research suggests employees are willing – and want – to stay up-to-date with company news when not physically at work. We live in a fast moving world where mainstream news is updated constantly. It is perhaps unsurprising we want work-related news to operate in a similar fashion – keeping us informed throughout the day, wherever we are.

We were delighted to see so many respondents suggesting ways a work-related app could be useful to them. This suggests it is worth asking your workforce what type of app to build – they are likely to be full of bright ideas.

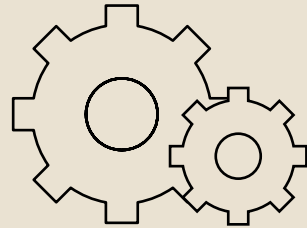
Slightly more men than women (7%) are more likely to download a work-related app to their own device.

Those answering 'maybe'

The 23% who are unsure about whether they would download a work app to their personal phone gave a variety of reasons:



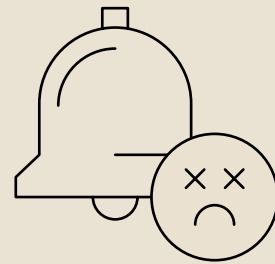
Limited storage capacity



Concerns that it would not be genuinely beneficial or useful



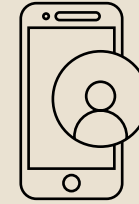
Concerns over privacy



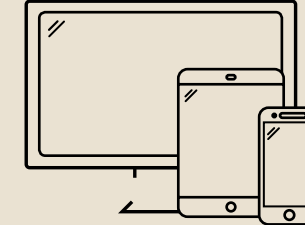
Notifications in 'personal time' that could become intrusive or annoying

Those answering 'no'

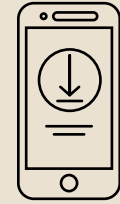
Of those who answered 'no', 41% had concerns about work-life balance.



"My personal phone is just that – personal."

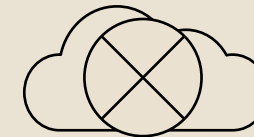


"I don't mix work and personal content on my devices."

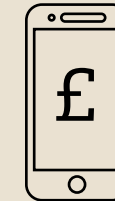


"If an employee really needs to know something they shouldn't be expected to download an app on their personal phone."

For some, there are technical limitations with their personal device:



"I wouldn't have enough storage."



"I just have a basic mobile pay as you go."



Women are significantly more likely to waver on the question of whether they would download a work app to their own phone. A total of 70% who answered 'maybe' were female.



Those who answered 'no' ranked all but one feature lower in terms of importance than those who answered 'yes' or 'maybe'. The feature they ranked slightly higher than those who said they would consider downloading an app was incentives – something to consider if you have a highly cynical workforce!

Conclusion

We set out to examine how and why we use our favourite apps. What makes some so appealing and how are we using them in our daily lives? Our intention was to identify useful insights and apply these to the world of internal communications.

When developing enterprise apps for employees, what lessons can we learn from the best in class? We are particularly interested in workforces that are not given smart devices. Would they download and use an IC app on their own smartphones?

It would be wrong to mandate the use of personal devices for work purposes. Respecting people's work-life balance is essential and often enshrined in the values of an organisation. Furthermore, we must not discriminate against those who cannot access information for technical reasons, such as a lack of storage capacity, web access or know-how.

An app designed for employees' own smartphones must be positioned as an optional extra. Its content should also sit somewhere else, easily accessible from a work device in work time.

That said, a significant majority of our respondents

– 68% – are open to the idea of downloading a work-related app to their own devices. This reflects other research studies we have undertaken inside client organisations.

The challenge is not your IC app's initial appeal, but how you can ensure it is not among the 97% of apps deleted within one month of being downloaded.

Regular use, which is most likely to be before and after work, is the best way to guard against its deletion.

Start with a clear objective. What need or desire is your app designed to fulfil? We are interested in apps that make our lives easier, but equally those that connect us to others. We are social beings. Any successful app is likely to have social features that build and maintain a sense of community.

Involve your workforce from the beginning. Ask them what to build. Then ask a small group of early adopters to test and refine your app. Do not launch your app until it is ready – completely ready. Second chances are rare.

Your launch campaign should not oversell your app's features and benefits. This is

a good time to under promise and over deliver. Word of mouth and personal recommendation will drive take-up.

Schedule updates for when people are most likely to be checking their devices – early mornings, late afternoons or during breaks. Content should be created for the small screen – bite-sized, rich, multi-media content with more than a whiff of wit and irreverence.

Monitor user analytics carefully and use this data to direct your editorial decisions. You have only a small window of opportunity to attract and retain people's attention once they have decided to try your app. You will need to adopt a 'news room' approach, which may require new skills, processes and recourses. Mobile content requires communicators to be bold, brave and creative. We must act in the moment – quickly creating images, stories and videos that are genuinely relevant and topical. Consider the dent in credibility if company news contained in your IC app did not reflect breaking news in the world at large.



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