

A ASSOCIATION CONVENTIONS & FACILITIES

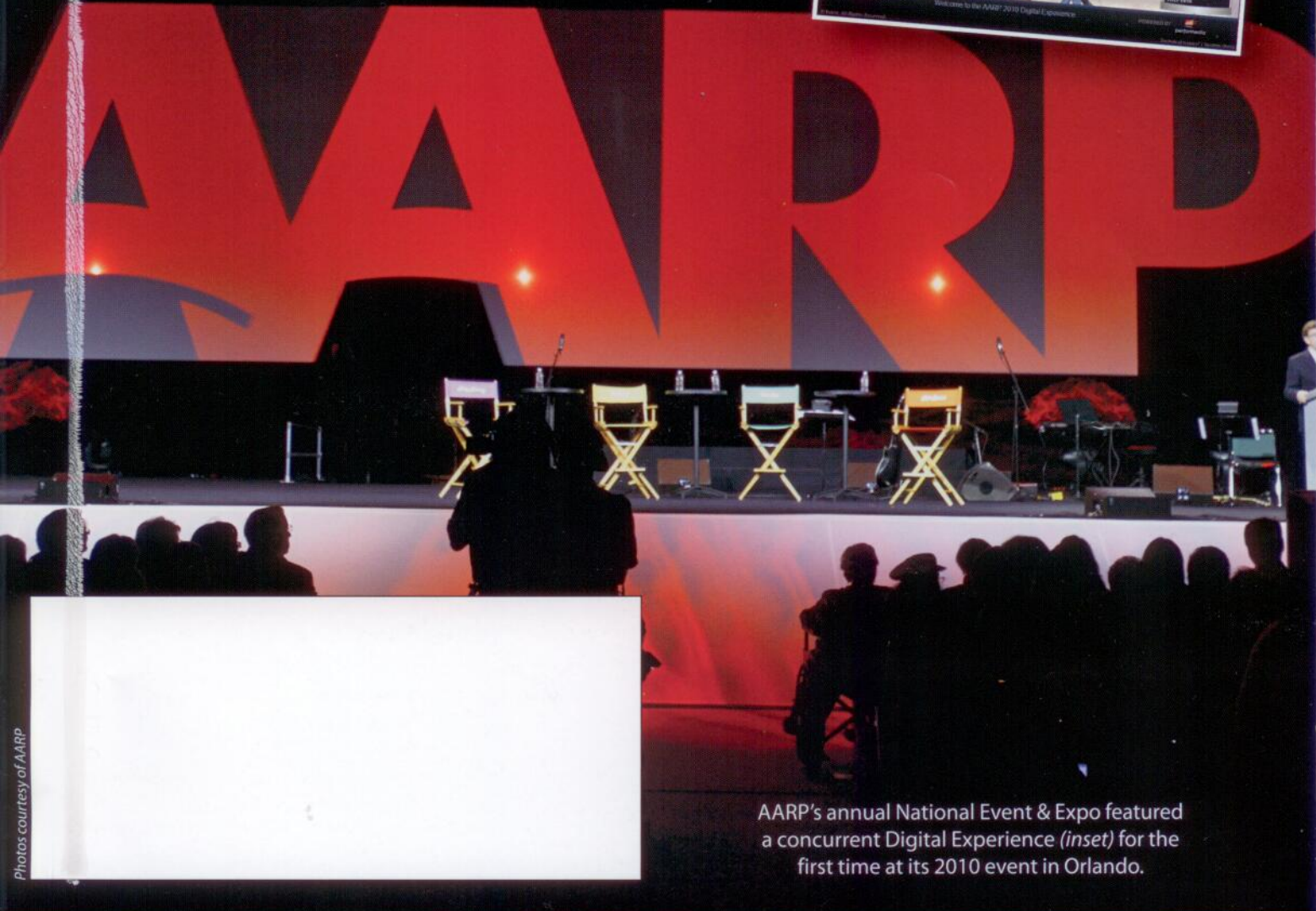
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THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION MEETING PLANNING MANAGEMENT

Not Your Father's Trade Show

New Trends and Tactics to Boost ROI

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AARP's annual National Event & Expo featured a concurrent Digital Experience (*inset*) for the first time at its 2010 event in Orlando.

Photos courtesy of AARP



Meetings to Go

Mobile Apps That Click With Attendees and Planners

The Boston Convention and Exhibition Center offers the myBCEC app developed by Swift Mobile. The app allows users to navigate the facility, staff and services, and provides information about hotels, transportation, retailers, restaurants and more.

By Derek Reveron

exhibitor information and floor plans. They could also get information about the facility and destination. Everything you would typically see in our hard copy onsite guide we had in our mobile app."

The app was produced by **Boopsie Inc.**, a Palo Alto, CA-based provider of mobile apps for conferences and trade shows. Boopsie provided the app in different versions, called "flavors," for BlackBerry, iPhone and Android smart phones. Attendees also could access a Web-based version of the app online. The app was a hit, with more than half of attendees using it. NFPA will use an app again at this year's conference in Anaheim, CA.

Bailey attributes the app's success partly to the NFPA's education and communication efforts. Before the conference, the NFPA publicized

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) is among the associations leading the way in using mobile software applications for attendees and exhibitors. The NFPA first used an app at its 2010 Conference & Expo, which was held in June at the Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, attracting about 5,000 attendees. They were able to access the conference guide and other information by downloading an app from a website.

"We put all of the information for the conference in the palms of attendees' hands," says Linda Bailey, CMP, division manager, conferences and meetings, for NFPA. "They could view speaker lists, conference schedules, session times and descriptions, access social media, communicate with each other and see



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Reggie Henry, CAE
Chief Information Officer, ASAE, Washington, DC



Reggie Henry with his ever-present iPad.

the app in e-mail blasts and the association's magazine and other publications. During the conference, NFPA posted signs that provided information about the app, and Boopsie CEO Greg Carpenter attended the general session to introduce the product and answer questions about it.

The NFPA turned to apps to help attendees be more efficient and eventually reduce paper conference guides. "So far, we have done it in parallel with paper guides to help people transition from them," says Bailey. "But we may reduce the size of our onsite guide this year, and the goal is to do away with hard copies. Several of our board members were very pleased that we went this route, and that it showed how progressive our association is in keeping up with the times."

Mobile apps help planners stretch budgets and maintain and build membership by keeping attendees engaged with association conferences and services. The growth in apps use will be one of this year's top meetings technology trends, according to Corbin Ball, CMP, CSP, a consultant, writer and speaker specializing in events and meetings technology.

"The year 2010 has seen hundreds of new mobile phone apps benefiting meeting planners, attendees and exhibitors — and many more are in the pipeline," says Ball. "Smart-phone 'microcomputers' are increasingly being used for networking, lead exchange, electronic ticketing, way-finding, audience polling, surveys, pocket programs, pocket exhibit guides, course notes/literature collection and much more. The year 2011 will see many of these tools working into mainstream conference use and many new ones emerge."

AN APP-ALANCHE?

Reggie Henry, CAE, chief information officer for ASAE, speaks frequently to large and small associations about technology issues and tracks the number of companies that specialize in producing mobile meeting apps. "At my last check there were at least 15 companies. But most meeting planning companies that provide registration or meeting planning services and software are also developing mobile apps. Within a few years, they will be a standard offering from meeting planning companies that serve associations. I'd say that one in four associations I visit use an app or mobile Web presence for meetings. That's due to a lack of knowledge about apps and misperceptions about the complexity and cost. But that will

change as perception catches up with reality and more apps are produced," says Henry.

Experts predict that there eventually will be an app for every planner, attendee and exhibitor activity. "As more developers and publishers enter the meeting planning industry, there will be more and more apps created with unique functionality to help us excel as meeting planners," says Kirsten Strand, CMM, CITE, BSc and CEO of Canada-based Invenia incentive. "The demands and requirements of meeting planners are constantly changing. There are definitely apps that would benefit meeting planners that do not exist yet." Invenia and IMEX Group founded *meetingapps.com*, which provides access to several hundred meeting-related apps in 26 categories, including meeting management, conferences, destinations, hotel search, venues, air travel, risk management, audio-visual and green tools.

Use of meeting apps will grow along with the use of smart phones. Overall, smart phones comprise about one-third of the mobile phone market, according to a recent survey by Nielsen, an audience measurement and research company. According to a survey of more than 1,000 hosted buyers at IMEX in Frankfurt in 2010, 57 percent of respondents use BlackBerrys, 31 percent use iPhones and 24 percent use Nokia phones. Now that Verizon offers the iPhone, surveys indicate that as many as half of BlackBerry and Android users may switch to the iPhone. "People in the meetings industry tend to be business travelers and they have a high adoption rate of smart phones" says Ball. "But people are resistant to change and everybody's not anxious to download the latest meeting app. I think it will take a couple of years for apps to work itself into mainstream planning, but it's well on the way."

LARGE ASSOCIATIONS LEAD THE WAY

Large associations are leading the way in using meeting apps. The National Association of Realtors (NAR) began using a mobile app at the organization's 2009 Realtors Conference & Expo in San Diego in November. The NAR expanded app use to its May 2010 Midyear Legislative Meeting & Trade Expo in Washington, DC. The NAR is further expanding app use to its 2011 AE Institute meeting in Dallas in



Linda Bailey, CMP
Division Manager
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"They could view speaker lists, conference schedules, session times...social media... exhibitor information. ...Everything you would typically see in our hard copy onsite guide we had in our mobile app."

Photo by Glenwood Jackson Photography



The National Fire Protection Association's first foray into using a mobile app for its conference guide was at its 2010 Conference & Expo at Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas.

March. The NAR's apps include a conference guide and information about the meeting venue and destination. Members helped drive the move to apps. "Partially, it was member interest and requests because more of them are using mobile phones and tablet computers. And there was more member interest in wanting information in portable format," says Roz Kriener, NAR director, conference programs.

While the apps are designed for attendees, NAR's conference planning staff also found the tools useful. "As a planner, it was very helpful to look up something on the fly rather than carry a book to look it up," Kriener explained. "Many of the staff used their devices when somebody asked a question rather than having to radio to someone or find a paper copy of a

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Kirsten Strand, BSc, CITE, CMM
CEO
Invenia Incentives
Vancouver, BC



Photo by Glenn Garrison Ottmann

guide." The NAR doesn't plan to phase out paper convention guides yet because many members still want printed versions available, she adds.

ASAE provides one multifaceted app for meeting planners, attendees and exhibitors who attend the organization's largest meetings — the Annual

Meeting & Exposition, the Technology Conference & Expo and the Springtime Expo. The app allows attendees to access program guides, research speakers, receive real-time alerts on schedule changes and view comments about sessions on Twitter feeds. Attendees also can locate exhibitors alphabetically and by category, plot routes through exhibit halls and access descriptions, e-mail, phone numbers and Web addresses of exhibitors.

At the 2010 Technology Conference & Expo, more than half of attendees downloaded the app. ASAE eventually will provide the app for all of its large meetings. Henry advises associations to provide one basic app in different smart-phone flavors. "Just like an association doesn't need a lot of websites, it doesn't need a lot of apps," Henry says. "It should be a place for people to get information and interact with the association in a variety of ways. It should be a face of your organization just like your website."

Other examples:

Digestive Disease Week's 2010 annual conference in New Orleans, which attracted about 20,000 attendees, successfully used an app created by **Ascend Integrated Media** and **Handmark Inc.** The app provided a variety of information, including the latest papers and research introduced by presenters.

Attendees at MPI's July 2010 World Education Congress in Vancouver, BC, used a mobile app by **QuickMobile Inc.** The app allowed attendees and exhibitors to access trade show listings, venue information, an attendee database, event schedules, speaker profiles and a Twitter feed.

MORE MEETINGS APP PROVIDERS

A growing number of companies provide a variety of apps available for attendees, planners, exhibitors, venues, hotels, CVBs and convention centers. Here's a sampling of what's available:

Certain Software Inc. recently introduced **Certain 6.0**, an app that allows planners to access event registration information and provides real-time data on meetings and conventions to attendees. The application also allows planners to manage event registration, marketing, transportation, budgeting and post-event feedback.

Heathcote Media Group provides the **Super Planner**, which includes several tools that allow planners to calculate venue capacity, catering, staffing, food and beverage and audio visual needs.

Bartizan Connects provides **iLeads**, which manages trade show leads and allows exhibitors to qualify, survey and collect information about prospects.

MacroView Labs produces apps for associations, trade shows, corporate meetings and events, convention centers, DMCs, venues and hotels. The company's hotel clients provide the apps to planners to access information about meeting space, guest rooms and attractions. Planners can then add meeting-specific information to the app, including registration data, attendee lists, speaker bios, session schedules, surveys, videos and exhibitor information. Attendees access the information using an online passkey. "The growth engine for us has been events that have more than 300 to 400 attendees," says Aron Ezra, CEO of Macroview Labs.

SwiftMobile Inc. specializes in apps for venues, custom events, convention centers, businesses, associations and trade shows. CEO Kathleen Gilroy believes that it's important for meeting app producers to educate potential customers. "We differentiate our products around education. One thing that has become clear is that there is a big educational process needed for people running meetings and their customers. We're building tools and materials and content to help them manage the process of going mobile," says Gilroy.

The education tools will include information about using apps profitably. "For associations and venues, they really need to feel they will recoup investment or make a profit," Gilroy adds. Some associations, mostly larger ones, are already making profits from selling advertising on apps. One of SwiftMobile's customers, a large medical association, started using apps at its annual conference in 2010 and sold about \$30,000 in advertising. This year, the association expects to sell more than \$60,000 in advertising, mostly to pharmaceutical companies, Gilroy explains.

Companies that specialize in apps for mobile meeting and convention guides include **Core-Apps**, **Ootoweb**, **EventKaddy** and **Ativ Software**. The **ActivTouch** smart-phone application by Montreal-based **Sherpa Solutions** won first place in the 2010 WorldWide Technology Watch for "highlighting mobile technology's potential to transform events and trade shows." **ShowGuide** by **Rivermatrix Technologies Inc.** permits conference attendees to view information about exhibitors, sessions and education courses as well as exhibit floor maps. Mobile



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Aron Ezra
CEO
MacroView Labs
San Francisco, CA

meeting guides can start as low as \$2,000 to \$3,000 and cost up to several thousand dollars.

SITE SELECTION APPS

There are also apps that help planners search hotels and venues for room space, availability and pricing. **5StarHotels** provides descriptions and information on services and amenities for more than 2,000 luxury hotels worldwide. **MyMobile Travel**, an app by **Primus Productions Inc.**, allows users to research and book rooms and meeting space in more than 100,000 hotels. **Venues** by **Net121 Ltd.** enables planners to access a database that matches their space and room requirements with specific facilities.

Many CVBs are also providing their own apps. Users can access information about the destination, venues and special promotions. Planners also can access virtual tours, videos and GPS technology to navigate the destination. For example, last year, the Chicago Convention & Tourism Bureau (CCTB) began providing **SCVNGR**, a game that can be used on mobile devices, to groups holding conventions and trade shows. In September, the International Manufacturing Technology Show (IMTS) used **SCVNGR** games designed to familiarize attendees with McCormick Place.

The ability to communicate and engage with association membership is paramount regardless of budget constraints. The power — and bottom-line economy — of mobile meeting technology not only ensures that the conversation continues before, during and after meetings and conventions, but provides enhanced ROI and ROE to attendees and exhibitors alike. And let's not forget making meeting planners' logistical lives a whole lot easier.



MacroView Labs builds apps and mobile sites for association meetings and conferences, association and corporate brands, hotels and venues such as convention centers.