

# BUILD BUY

15 things you need to know before you build an event app in-house or buy it from an event app developer

Trying to decide whether to build or buy an event app? Chances are your organization has at least a few do-it-yourself enthusiasts or even teams of top notch technologists that can build anything with enough time, money and human capital.

However, making a “build vs. buy” decision is not a trivial exercise and developing even the simplest mobile event app may result in numerous unintended consequences.

**Here are 15 things you should consider when deciding whether to build or buy an event app:**



## 1. Beware the path of least resistance

Given a choice between creating native apps or a single web-based app, developers typically default to the path of least resistance: a web-based app. Web-based apps provide an inferior, template-style user experience with less consistency across device types and operating systems than native apps. They also rely heavily on users being constantly connected to the Internet – something that is always a challenge in convention centers and meeting facilities.

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## 2. User experience is paramount

Native apps provide a better experience for the user because each app is tailored to that device’s platform. They allow for seamless integration between pages and layouts, plus the ability to display video and other kinds of rich media. In addition, they offer the option to integrate features native to the mobile device such as the camera and push notifications. Since app adoption requires a simple, intuitive user experience, trained designers are a must when you build event apps.

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### 3. Balance the front-end with the back-end

From a developer's perspective it's always easier to develop the front-end of the solution. Developers tend to be more focused on app features and design, and less concerned about building a robust back-end system with the data management and integration capabilities needed to handle the complexities of events. Imagine doing a live poll of an audience and having thousands of people responding at once. Can the back-end handle the load?

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### 4. Native app development is evolving

It's important to understand the complexity of building native apps across major device platforms, including iOS, Android, Blackberry and Windows Phone. Each platform uses a unique operating system (that is always changing) and requires a completely different, constantly evolving software development environment. In other words, each operating system is in a different stage of development at any point in time. This means you have to be prepared to support the old and the new because you have no control over what devices people will bring to your meeting or event.

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### 5. Attendees show up with all kinds of devices

Attendees are likely to show up at your events with devices that may only be a few weeks old or possibly five years old. Each device type has a different size, screen resolution, navigation standard, hardware capabilities, and security and privacy options. In addition, many attendees come to events equipped with corporate mobile devices, each with its own unique firewall, encryption, security, email and permissions settings established by employers. If you build it yourself, you have to take all of these devices and considerations into account.

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### 6. You'll need an expert in app distribution

Once you develop your event app, you need to get it into the hands of your attendees. That requires an understanding of how to release your app on the app stores for each device platform, each with its own terms, approval processes and timelines. If you want your event app to be listed privately on the app stores using an enterprise license, you'll need to follow a different process.

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## 7. Open your eyes to security threats

To ensure your content remains secure, find out how experienced your developers are in integrating mobile apps with an organization's security policies and standards. Be sure to ask what permissions can be put in place to ensure attendees only gain access to information they are authorized to view. Depending on the type of organization you work for, you may want to determine if your developers have the skills to build apps that utilize encryption and secure data handling and can meet software verification tests and security standards such as PCI compliance. Would your app pass a third party security audit? What would you do if you had a security breach?

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## 8. Be prepared for extreme conditions

Events often take place in meeting facilities with extremely poor WiFi access. That means you'll need an event app that is optimized to function properly with little connectivity to WiFi. Your app should also be designed to handle bursts of extreme usage from attendees during events and should be proven to withstand the high demands placed upon it in a real-life environment.

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## 9. Your brand is under scrutiny

Your event app is perhaps the most direct engagement point attendees will have with your brand, so you'll want to make it a fantastic experience. Remember that the app resides on the mobile device in the form of a customized icon and may be accessed by attendees long after the event or even year-round. Deep integration of your branding into the user experience will only reinforce the strength of your brand and reputation. Design it with the brand in mind first and foremost.

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## 10. Events demand flexibility

Never underestimate the importance of having a flexible event app that can adapt to the ever-changing conditions of events, such as schedule and speaker changes, real-time broadcasts and promotions, and time-sensitive document updates. If the lunch venue has to be moved at the last minute, you need to have the ability to change the location on the fly within the app and even message your attendees that there is a new location.

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## 11. You're always going to need help

No matter how great your event app is, take the time to carefully assess the service and support you'll need before, during and immediately after your events. Don't settle for anything less than an attentive support team that will help you manage content, respond to changes and support requests on the fly and help you interpret your results. When the event kicks off, the last thing you have time for is troubleshooting the mobile app. It has to work.

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## 12. Your app may be more popular than you think

Chances are if your event app catches on, your organization may want more apps than you originally anticipated. Building scalability into your event app solution from the very beginning will mean you'll be able to deploy quickly and won't have to reinvent the wheel when it comes time to creating tens, hundreds or even thousands of apps for future events.

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## 13. Always measure your impact

Make sure your app is designed to give you the insight you need into your event's effectiveness. A built-in analytics dashboard and reporting capabilities will help you better understand levels of participation and networking, the effectiveness of your announcements and promotions, and what's happening in real-time at your events.

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## 14. Don't get lost in translation

If you're playing host to participants from around the world, your event app should provide an equally engaging experience for everyone involved. Consider the importance of a multilingual app that allows participants to learn and communicate in their own languages and within their own cultural contexts.

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## 15. Avoid sudden death

Finally, no matter how much time and resources you dedicate to building an event app, keep in mind that event apps must always be completed on time. Delivering one day late is simply not an option.

