From apps and registration to customer service and lead retrieval, mobile technology has created endless opportunities for trade show applications and solutions. There’s no doubt that mobile is the hottest tech trend in the trade show industry and will be for the foreseeable future. It’s changing the way the show organizers communicate with exhibitors and attendees, how exhibitors and attendees interact, and when and where suppliers can provide information and customer service.

“Mobile usage is soaring,” said Mark Haley, president, SmartCity Networks. “One-quarter of mobile users will own two or more mobile-connected devices by 2016. In addition, the growth in usage per device will outpace the growth in the number of devices. From 2011 to 2016, data usage is expected to grow 119% on smartphones and 129% on tablets.”
Last month, at the International Association of Exhibitions & Events (IAEE) 2012 Annual Meeting & Expo! in Orlando, I presented Tech Trends to Watch, featuring a panel discussion with leading industry service providers including Shawn Pierce, president of registration & housing for Experient; George Hines, chief information officer for Viad Corp., parent company of Global Experience Specialists (GES); Jay Tokosch, CEO, Core-Apps; and Mark Haley, president, Smart City Networks.

I asked our panel to comment on the hottest trends of 2012 and whether they will be hot or not in 2013. Here’s a summary of the discussion.

01 Mobile Integration & Optimization
As more exhibitors and attendees use their mobile devices for business, show organizers must offer solutions to enhance their experience before, during and after the event. Many shows have invested in mobile-optimized web sites that make it easier for their customers to navigate on those devices. In addition, some shows are offering a condensed registration on mobile devices with fewer click-throughs. Suppliers are responding by offering more integrated products and services that are updated in real-time across all platforms.

“Using mobile technology on site, contractors and show organizers can have real-time access to information about their customers’ value and history to improve customer service,” said Hines. “We can track metrics such as how many orders are open and how long orders take to be filled.”

02 Mobile Apps
It’s clear that mobile apps will continue to grow in the trade show industry. Just about every show organizer in the room said they have an app or are planning to have an app for their next show. “Content is king,” said Tokosch. “Growth is coming from shows adding more and more content within the app.” Worldwide mobile app store downloads will surpass 45.6 billion in 2012, with free downloads accounting for 40.1 billion.

“Best of all, regarding the behind-the-scenes details, the MYS staff has been thoughtful, responsive and easy to work with. Simply, they are a good partner.”

Chris Semon, Director of Sales & Membership, SnowSports Industries America (SIA)
and paid-for downloads totaling 5 billion, according to a report released by Gartner in September 2012. "Unlike a printed show directory, apps can provide unlimited real estate for revenue opportunities," said Tokosch. "You don’t have to be a mega show like CES to generate revenue from your app. Among our clients, the show that generates the most revenue from its app has about 20,000 attendees."

In addition to mobile app providers, many industry provider segment rolled out mobile apps or new features for existing apps at Expo! Expo! (see "New Product Roundup," page 42).

**Interactive Technology**

In the past, many shows have offered interactive tech solutions, but attendees weren’t adopting them in big numbers. But that’s shifting. The key: User-friendly interface and seamless design. For example, companies, such as IndustryConnect and Presdo Match, are pre-populating attendee and exhibitor profiles by pulling data from LinkedIn.

With so many tech solutions and features, it can be overwhelming for users. That can lead to low participation and high dropout rates. Portals and dashboards with single log-in access can make it less confusing for exhibitors and attendees.

"I think we will see a reduction in silo-based systems," said Pierce. "It’s about getting the usage to a certain level so that you can offset expenses with sponsorships."

**Increasing Bandwidth**

Increased mobile device usage means increased demand for bandwidth. And exhibitors and attendees are using their mobile devices for more than simply email.

"We have tripled the amount of bandwidth used at convention centers in the last two years," said Haley. "Buildings are struggling to keep up with demand."

While many show organizers would like to see free WiFi in convention centers, that expectation doesn’t seem very realistic given the current demand and

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**Big Data**

Trade shows gather an enormous amount of data on their customers during each show cycle. The challenge is harnessing the data you have to make better and quicker business decisions. Shows are looking for data consolidation and management tools from suppliers, but cost, efficiency and effectiveness are still critical challenges. "If you don’t have a consolidated place that you are storing the data, that’s something you need to be working on very quickly," said Pierce.

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need for technology upgrades to keep pace. “Some cities are going through budget concerns, so upgrades have been slow in coming,” said Haley.

Many convention centers are offering free WiFi in lobby areas, and some are offering tiered pricing options or offering bundling discounts.

Going Paperless

Most industry suppliers believe this is a trend that will continue to grow. Many shows are going completely or partially paperless when it comes to show directories, exhibitor service kits, program guides, show dailies and much more.

To reduce printing costs and increase acceptance among exhibitors and attendees, some show organizers are offering incentives for using electronic files. “For CONEXPO-CON/AGG, the program guide is available for free in the app, but show organizers charge $10 for the printed program before the show and $20 on site,” said Tokosch.

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In December, etouches launched eMobile, an app that can be designed, tested and published by non-technical staff through a drag-and-drop and point-and-click interface. eMobile was created for organizations that produce more than one event and need an associated mobile app. Show organizers can choose colors and choose page layouts that automatically bring in content from etouches and etocia, as well as add buttons and custom content. eMobile is part of etouches’ Plus Program and can be added to any Quad or Pro package with an addition to a subscription agreement. etouches provides a worksheet on its website to calculate fees based on the number of events and branding options.

In December, Experient launched Engage, a mobile event guide for shows. Integrated with registration, housing and lead retrieval, Engage features a native iPhone and Android mobile app. Engage includes a native iPhone and Android mobile app that brings the service desk to exhibitors, PlusTours, a tool for planning and identifying locations for banners and signage at facilities throughout North America, Exhit-Planer, an online collaboration tool for exhibit management, Presentation Management, a program that streamlines electronic speaker materials, and Passport, a collaboration tool for coordinating graphics, signage and floor plans. FTS is complimentary for Freeman customers.

In September, Freeman introduced the Freeman Technology Suite (FTS), an integrated platform that brings together six web-based expo and audio-visual tools. The easy-to-navigate, centralized hub allows users to access Freeman Online for online ordering; Concierge Elite, a mobile app that brings the service desk to exhibitors; PlusTours, a tool for planning and identifying locations for banners and signage at facilities throughout North America; Exhit-Planer, an online collaboration tool for exhibit management; Presentation Management, a program that streamlines electronic speaker materials; and Passport, a collaboration tool for coordinating graphics, signage and floor plans. FTS is complimentary for Freeman customers.

Global Experience Specialists (GES) launched the E-Literature Rack, a touchscreen tool that features content and captures leads. Attendees can browse, read and select electronic content, including PDFs and videos, to email themselves to read or view later. Attendees must leave contact information to obtain materials, but E-Lit can be integrated with badge swipe, bar code, mag stripe or RFID to automatically collect attendee contact information. Exhibitors can measure interest, open and readership rates by piece. E-Lit offers an environmentally conscious tool that eliminates the needs for printing and disposal of materials and can reduce costs for printing, shipping and handling. The product debuted at an exhibitor’s booth at the North American Veterinary Conference 2012 in April. The Association of Equipment Manufacturers (AEM) will be the first show organizer client to use the product at its AG Connect Expo, which will be held January 29–31 in Kansas City, MO. The E-Lit brochure rack is priced with or without equipment. The starting price without equipment is $7,500 or $11,500 with equipment.

At the IAEE Annual Meeting & Expo! Expo!, IndustryConnect, in partnership with Presdo Match, launched the Attendee Toolkit. The toolkit features LinkedIn integrated networking, match-making and appointment scheduling functionality. The product also features social invites, a session and event planner, an exhibitor directory and activities schedule. The toolkit includes a mobile web site with HTML5 or native apps that sync with the online system so attendees and exhibitors can access the information on site during the event. IndustryConnect can provide show managers with the ability to choose between higher upfront cost with a higher share of the revenue or minimal upfront cost to save money short term.

ITN International launched MyBCard, a free app that lets attendees collect information at events using near-field communication (NFC) smartphones. With the app, attendees can touch NFC-enabled badges, business cards and posters at an event and store the encoded content in a personal cloud. Badge and business card information can also be added to the contacts stored on the phone. The app can be downloaded from the Google Playstore. The app cannot be used by iPhones because they are not currently NFC-enabled. ITN International won a bronze award for My BCard at WIMA NFC USA 2012, held November 27-29 in San Francisco and ITN’s President, Ivan Lazarev, won Third Place in the category of “Most Innovative Individual in the Trade Show Industry” in Trade Show Executive’s Innovation Awards 2012.
Gamification
Expectations for gamification were high in 2012, but only a small, albeit engaged, percentage of attendees have been participating in gaming applications for trade shows. "Gamification is a big buzz word, but adoption has been slow in the trade show industry," said Tokosch. "We are seeing usage rates of about 10%, especially in the first year."

In 2012, some shows were selling sponsored treasure hunts, where attendees visit exhibitor booths to pick up badges or codes to win prizes. "Gamification is currently being driven by novelty and hype," according to Gartner, which released a study on the gamification in November 2012. "By 2014, 80% of current gamified applications will fail to meet business objectives primarily because of poor design."

Indoor Positioning Systems
Foursquare and other location-based apps gained momentum among consumers in 2011 and 2012, but typically these services haven’t been as useful in the trade show environment because they can’t zero in on specific locations within a building, such as a booth or meeting room.

There were high expectations for growth in this area in 2012, but a cost-effective technology solution is just not available yet. There are simply not enough access points within a convention centers to allow for close-range WiFi triangulation. "It can be done today, if you want to pay for it," said Pierce.

In December, Ungerboeck launched Ungerboeck Dashboard, which can be personalized by show to create a quick overview of key performance indicators in real time. The Ungerboeck Dashboard provides executive-level reporting tools and supports specific performance measurement, such as projected revenues, economic impact, sales in the pipeline and new business. Unlike static reports or third-party business intelligence applications, the Ungerboeck Dashboard is available in real time, as it automatically consolidates information from across the organization. The dashboard is free for Ungerboeck clients who upgrade to the current software version in 2013.

In addition, Ungerboeck introduced Ungerboeck Mobile, an app for attendees to enhance their event experience. Attendees can track sessions they plan to attend, exhibitors they want to visit, and identify networking opportunities on their mobile devices. Attendee profiles are included in the app, and attendees can also flag their favorites for future follow up. Show organizers can publish updates, and attendees will receive notifications from the app. Ungerboeck Mobile is compatible with all event management software but is optimized to work with Ungerboeck Software. Pricing for Ungerboeck Mobile is dependent on the specific app, which is tailored to industry segment and based on client needs.

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