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## **A new consumer touchpoint**

## **Consequences of slow loading**

## **Poor experience drives switching**

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# **Opinion Piece**

## **Monitoring mobile app performance**

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### **Abstract**

The pivotal role of mobile apps turns up the pressure on brands and organizations to anchor business applications on mobile platforms. This article explains why monitoring and managing app performance is essential to delivering apps and experiences that do what users expect — even demand.

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As mobile apps gain traction as the way your audience prefers to access information and content and engage with your brand, it has never been more important for organizations to monitor just how well their apps are performing.

Indeed, the advance of mobile apps — for smartphones, tablets and even TVs — is redrawing the boundaries of what people can do on the mobile device of their choice. However, mobile apps are driving much more than increased activity and content consumption. They also represent a new consumer touchpoint that marketers must learn to manage properly in order to meet (and exceed) customer expectations for a good mobile app experience.

Studies already show that consumers are quite unforgiving if their mobile internet experience is not instant and consistent. In fact, half of mobile users abandon a page if it does not load in 10 seconds and three out of five will not return to the site. Commerce giant Amazon recently calculated that a page load slowdown of just one second could cost it US \$1.6 bn in sales each year. It's easy to imagine that poor mobile app performance could have similar disastrous consequences.

Research suggests a relationship between the quality of a mobile experience and the customer's opinion of the brand. According to a recent survey, which specifically examined how mobile customer service apps can influence brand reputation, the vast majority (92 per cent) of respondents said they felt a brand was innovative after experiencing good customer service delivered by that company's app.

By the same token, delivering a poor mobile app experience can do irreparable damage to your brand. The same survey found that 73 per cent of consumers had a lower opinion of the brand as a result of experiencing poor customer service delivered by that company's mobile app. More than half (58 per cent) said such an episode would even prompt them to switch to a different brand altogether.

## Role of apps in CRM

With mobile apps becoming increasingly vital to how customers perceive (and interact with) brands, marketers must focus resources on creating a mobile app experience that delights their customers. However, they must also ensure that their mobile app delivers a good user experience — without fail.

To do this effectively, marketers must build the capabilities to manage, improve and measure how their mobile apps perform. This is not to say that marketers should merely charge their IT departments with the task of monitoring disruptions in the availability and quality of applications. That was the task of organizations over a decade ago when Application Performance Management (APM), as it was defined by research firm Gartner, was correctly identified as the chief focus for organizations across all verticals.

Fast forward, and the advance of mobile has transformed APM. It is no longer about operating an ‘early warning system’ to detect disruptions in software and service. Mobile APM has evolved to take on central importance in a wider Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy aimed at understanding, prioritizing, isolating and addressing problems around the mobile app before the customer experience is negatively impacted.

Simply put, mobile APM has become an essential part of managing the complete customer experience. This is an increasingly difficult task because mobile apps have become much more sophisticated, consisting of many ‘moving parts’ and partners to manage, monitor and understand.

### Three areas of focus for apps

Unsurprisingly, the findings of several C-Level surveys show organizations are currently behind the curve when it comes to managing and understanding mobile app. However, they are also eager to close the gap. Rather than scatter energies and resources, marketers should focus on the three key levels where problems can arise and must be addressed — Device, Network and Third Party.

#### Devices

- *Devices are highly fragmented:* There are many variables to factor into the equation, including screen sizes, operating system and device features. In addition, behaviour under different ‘environmental’ conditions, such as the wireless (wi-fi) signal and protocol, the number and composition of apps running on the device, and resource consumption (memory, battery, throughput), can cause an app to crash.

#### Networks

- *Connections are not always reliable:* At the network level, app performance is intertwined with network performance. Issues such as latency at the end points, the amount of data transferred and the bandwidth available can interrupt or degrade the user experience delivered by the app.

#### Third Party

- *Third parties can have their problems:* Integration with third parties, such as Google, Facebook or Twitter, may bring value to your app, but it can also boost the complexity you need to understand and manage in real-time.

Ensuring app performance can be a daunting task. However, it is better to invest in the skills to properly monitor and manage the mobile app experience than to risk disappointing customers. Keep in mind that achieving this level of performance (and customer satisfaction) is a moving target.

**Need to monitor apps**

Rather than struggle to keep pace with the fast and furious rate of technology change, choose a solution delivered through a cloud-based infrastructure that is sure to scale and adapt to your business requirements over time.

Up until now, most marketers have relied on two information sources to find out whether their mobile app is performing well: user ratings on app stores and social trend analysis. However, just watching to see whether consumers have issues is not a wise strategy. If users do suffer a bad app experience, they will no doubt amplify their displeasure through social media. This draws attention to the brand for all the wrong reasons.

While many mobile APM solutions will monitor and analyse performance of mobile sessions, it is important to choose one that automates the process and delivers results in real-time. More importantly, an effective mobile APM solution should tie mobile session analysis back to business goals, such as retaining customers, encouraging brand interaction or enabling a mobile purchase. This allows marketers visibility into how app performance issues are experienced by actual customers.

**Matching app performance to value**

The importance of this capability becomes clear if we imagine a scenario in which a mobile retail app crashes during the holiday shopping season. In this case, the mobile APM solution, which effectively ‘sorts’ app crash groups by the number of users affected and their corresponding profile, determines that the app crash affects iPhone users. The retailer, which has data on its customer base, knows its most valuable customers are also Apple iPhone users.

On the basis of the real-time analysis provided by the mobile APM solution, the retailer knows this disruption will likely have a tremendous negative impact on its brand and its revenues. It can therefore make the decision to allocate resources immediately to solve this problem and can send a personal apology via SMS to the customers who have opted in to assure them that this app performance issue will be resolved in due course.

**Delivering consistent experiences**

In the coming months, mobile APM will no doubt emerge as an essential component of a wider CRM strategy to identify, resolve and prevent issues that can impact the quality of the customer experience delivered by mobile apps. Moving forward, it will also guide marketers as they seek ways to deliver consistent and excellent mobile app experiences across multiple screens that will encourage interaction and boost customer loyalty in the long term.