Mobilizing Your Business
For consumers on the go, smart phones and other mobile devices are becoming the preferred route to Internet access

By Bill G. Felkey

Here are some interesting technology facts to consider. More than 93 percent of our nation’s adults (and many teenagers and younger) are carrying cell phones. The majority of people keep these devices within three feet of them 24/7. More than half of these devices are now smart phones. And more than one million smart phones are being activated every day. Increasingly, the way that consumers access the Internet is through portable information appliances.

With the exception of websites such as Google, most sites appear on mobile devices as if they are on a desktop computer. If you want to know how your pharmacy website operates with regard to this form factor analysis, just open up your mobile device and enter in your pharmacy website address. If you have to scroll vertically and horizontally to find information on your site using your mobile device, then you might want to consider developing a mobile application for your pharmacy operations and typical transactions with patients, or you can do a mobile friendly website as an alternative.

Mobile Sites and Apps

Just like Google, you can place code on your website that recognizes the device being used to access it and format the content of your website accordingly. One advantage of doing a mobile website as opposed to creating a mobile application is the benefit of avoiding the download process and payment of fees to Web App developers and transaction fees to Google Play or the Apple Store. You can simply distribute the address of your mobile website or have your current website redirect users to the mobile site.

I was first exposed to the use of mobile websites in pharmacy during the NCPA Annual Convention last October in San Diego. Will Lockwood, senior editor of Computer Talk for the Pharmacist, pharmacy owner Jeff Harrell, and I presented a panel discussion on the fast-paced world of mobile apps. This interactive session allowed members of the pharmacy audience to share all of their concerns about workload, workflow, and security issues. I focused my presentation on applications that connect the patient to the pharmacy and important information regarding their medications and adherence to medication regimens. Harrell presented a series of recommended applications that help with specific pharmacist resources. Lockwood jumped in on both
of our talks and contributed his insights on developing trends and best-of-breed examples.

Some of the business-related apps you may want to take a look at include Dropbox, which allows “cloud” storage and transfer of files. Document management apps such as DocsToGo and QuickOffice were recommended to handle creating Microsoft Office suite documents and managing attachments for incoming email. We also covered RDP and PhoneMyPC to handle remote desktop connectivity. You can use your smart phone to operate any computer remotely as if you were sitting in front of it. Other applications in the pharmacy business category include document scanning, speech recognition, and knowledge management categories. If you send an email to the address I will supply at the end of this article, I will be happy to send you a PDF of all of the recommended apps we covered in our presentation.

**Financial Apps**

Harrell, owner of Peninsula Pharmacies, Inc., in southwestern Washington, also introduced a suite of financial apps he finds valuable for management of six locations he owns and operates, which include five retail
Harrell’s professional pharmacy applications include Epocrates, Micromedex, and the Pharmacist’s Letter. He finds the Fingertip Formulary and SigCodes help when he is away from his pharmacy computer and he is able to access WebMD, First Aid, and YouTube to assist with patient education needs. A program called PrinterShare allows him to print patient education materials from his iPhone to the store printer. Thus he can supply disease-specific information and video resources to his patients. With so many applications in his life, Harrell finds the Keeper app to be an excellent way to manage his passwords for all of his connection needs.

The focus of this article, however, is to inform you about the ability to create a mobile website. Again, this is different than creating a mobile app. You can take the functionality present on your current site and repurpose these functions for use on mobile devices. For example, if you currently have a “request a refill” function on your website, this same function would be produced on a mobile website and the requests—when generated from a mobile device—would employ the same interface that is currently operating between your desktop website and your pharmacy management system. Figure 1 illustrates the mobile website used by Harrell’s six pharmacies.

**Functionality Features**

The functionality offered by Harrell’s mobile website includes general information on how to contact each pharmacy, business hours, and a brief history about Peninsula Pharmacies. The difference between accessing the icons on a desktop computer and a mobile phone is the ability to touch the telephone number or email address for each of the pharmacies and instantly be taken to the application appropriate for communication. Each time any area is selected on the website the content is formatted to fit the device viewing it. The opportunity to add the pharmacy to the address book of the cell phone is also available.

Products and services supplied by the pharmacies are listed in separate icons. The ability to refill prescriptions in three of the five pharmacies is present. The other two pharmacies were recently acquired and will be added shortly to the mobile website. Patient involvement and
updates on new information concerning the pharmacies flows regularly through social networking sites that include Facebook and Twitter. If a patient wants to know which pharmacist he or she spoke with face-to-face the last time they were in the pharmacy, touching the image icon will bring up pictures of each pharmacist from all locations. At any time that the user wishes to go to the desktop website a simple touch of the screen will facilitate this process.

Other features provide the opportunity to share the resource by broadcasting the address to friends. There is even the ability to have the mobile website translated in French, Spanish, and German. Harrell employed a Seattle-based firm called Unleashed Online Marketing (www.unleashed-online.com). The company has written interesting blogs on this topic and I would encourage you to visit its website and read more if you’re interested. You are also invited to email me at felkebg@auburn.edu. I would enjoy your feedback and questions regarding this topic.

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