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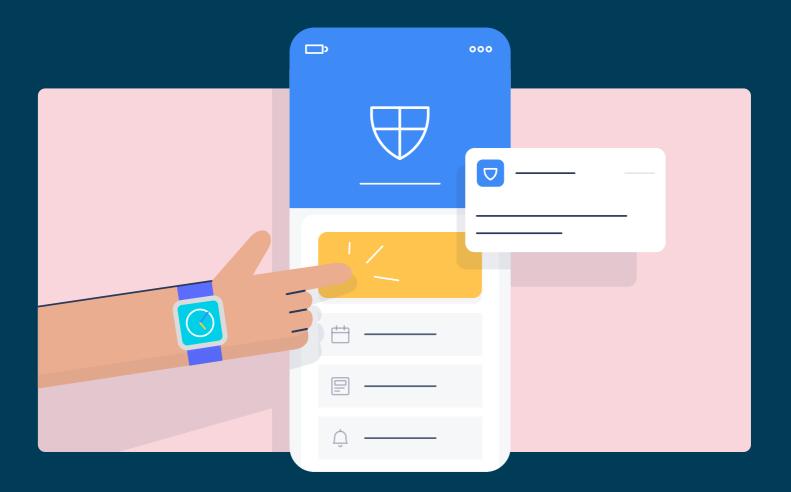
insights

A beginner's guide to school apps

↳ How to streamline and centralize your school's communication.

Contents

Let's get started!

Keys, wallet, sunglasses — **smartphone**! It's no secret that these handy little devices have become an essential part of our everyday lives. We rely on our phones and the handy apps contained within to complete some of the most basic tasks: shopping, banking, navigation, and, of course, communication. The average user now spends approximately 4.2 hours *per day* using apps on their smartphone — a 30% jump from just two years ago!

It's safe to say that we now live in a **mobile-first world**, where consumers expect to be able to engage with brands on their smartphones anywhere, anytime. So, it's easy to see why schools across the world are choosing to go mobile, too — by implementing a dedicated school app. In this **Beginner's Guide to School Apps**, you'll learn everything you need to know about getting started with your very own custom-branded app.

01

What is a school app?

In a nutshell, school apps take all of your communication channels and place them in one centralized location. No longer must parents trawl through multiple channels to find the information they need regarding their child's education and extracurricular activities — now, all of that information lives in their pocket! School apps function like regular apps, so there's no steep learning curve for parents who join your community. Instead, it's as simple as downloading, logging in (if your school requires it!), and **getting started!**

Mobile apps vs. responsive school websites

You might be wondering, "If my school website is already mobile-optimized, do I need to consider a mobile app too?" This is a great question and one that we've run into once or twice before. While providing a mobile-friendly user experience for your school website is **essential**, websites and school apps serve two very different purposes. Like many businesses, schools have two distinct markets: prospective families and existing school communities.

For a lot of prospective families, your school website is often the first point of contact they have with your brand. Your website plays a significant role in informing prospective families about your school, highlighting your unique selling proposition (or USP), and nurturing them toward enrollment at your school. On the other hand, your existing community is looking for ways to feel connected and engage with your school on a deeper level.

Your school app is a daily source of information and news **exclusively for your community** because it runs much deeper than what's included on your school website.

02

The big benefits of school apps

School apps are an incredibly worthwhile investment for your school community. Not only will parents love you for it, but your staff will appreciate the reduced administration that an app offers.

Your communication is all in one place

We touched on this above, but it bears repeating: school apps take all of the vital information a parent needs to properly support their child and places it into one, easy-to-access location.

When it comes to nurturing the relationship between schools and parents, **communication is key**. But when frequent communication (often across multiple channels) turns into a serious case of information overload, it's easy for important updates to slip through the cracks.

When you're designing your app, you can customize the contents to meet your school's specific communication needs. Not only can you take all your existing channels and move them into your app, but you can also use the app to fill any communication gaps.

Your newsletters will make it home

If you're relying on traditional, hard-copy newsletters and notices, how can you be sure that they're being read? Let's be honest, when it comes to sending print communication

home, you're taking a pretty big gamble on whether or not it makes it into the hands of your intended reader. Instead, many parents will find your newsletter or notice crumpled up at the bottom of a school bag, long after the information was relevant.

Not only is this a waste of your time and resources, but it does nothing to nurture your relationships with parents either. A school app provides you with the ability to **digitize your school's newsletters** and notices, and deliver them straight into your parents' hands — no schoolbag required! App newsletter delivery will work wonders for your school newsletter distribution, further diminishing any communication gaps that parents may be experiencing.

You can grab parents' attention — immediately!

Cast your mind back to a time when placing a message directly into the hands of thousands of people would have felt as though you had achieved some level of technical wizardry. Funnily enough, this is precisely what push notifications enable us to do.

Push notifications instantly deliver a snippet of urgent information to app users, prompting them to open your app to find out more. They are so effective because they look like text messages, but they can only reach people who have downloaded your school app.

Schools can use push notifications to let parents know about urgent, timely information ASAP, such as:

- Health warnings
- Weather warnings
- Grade releases
- Athletics cancellations
- Safety notices
- Event changes
- Important reminders

03

Choosing your school app provider

Once your school has decided that an app is for you, there are several businesses and agencies that you can choose to work with. Behind every great app is an even better team of developers and UX designers. This means it's essential that the team you choose to build your app has a deeper understanding of your unique communication needs and your overall business objectives.

Developing your app modules

Your app provider should guide you to choose the right app modules or features to help you achieve these objectives and improve your communication. These might include modules such as:

- Access to your school calendar
- The ability to mark a child absent from school
- Access to a child's unique timetable
- Photo galleries from school events
- Your social media feed

Designing your app

You'll also want to ensure that your app provider has a top-notch design team working with your app developers to ensure your app offers the best possible user experience. Because your school app is an extension of your brand, a good design team will also take care while implementing your school colors, fonts, and other brand elements.

Integrating your app with existing software

Finally, it's incredibly important that all of your software systems work seamlessly with each other. The best way to achieve this is through **integration**: building your app in a way that ensures your software can 'talk' to one another. This means that when you update information in one system, it will automatically pass on the updates to all of the other systems within the integration.

It's incredibly important that you choose a developer that is familiar with app integration and has existing partnerships with leading school software.

04

Getting people to download (and use) your school app

Once a school app has been developed, your next challenge is getting your school community to download your app. With any new technology or communication channel, adoption takes time. In our experience, many schools notice a big spike in interest upon launch and then a bit of a slump once the excitement decreases.

Planning a school app launch

An effective school app launch is the key ingredient to ensure that your app is successful. We recommend taking the time to plan a strategic launch well ahead of your school app's go-live date. To get started, outline all of the ways your new school app will help improve communication for your community. Hint: we've given you the **three biggest benefits** earlier in this post!

Once you have your benefit clearly articulated, you'll need to convey that message across your website, social media channels, and email with a clear call-to-action to download the app.

Understanding school app data

With your school app in full swing, it's time to dive into the data to understand how and when your community is engaging with your app. While most school apps will provide some basic information around downloaded data and app installs, a great way to learn even more about user behavior is to ensure Google Analytics is implemented in the app.

From Google Analytics, you can learn more about:

- The number of users accessing your school app
- What type of device users are accessing your school app on (Android or iOS)
- Which modules are being used most within your school app
- A live snap-shot of user activity

With greater visibility over this information, your marketing and communication teams will be able to see what content is resonating with your community and when they're most likely to engage with your school app so you can plan updates accordingly.

05

Working with Digistorm to design your school app

Congratulations! You're now up to speed on everything you need to know about getting started with a school app. Thinking about taking the next step? See what a Digistorm App can do for your school by booking a <u>one-on-one Digistorm App demo</u> with one of our friendly team members.

Our Apps are custom-built by our expert team of app developers and UX designers to meet your communication needs and business goals. We have <u>integration partnerships</u> with many leading school software systems and use secure authentication methods to make sure students' information is protected.

insights

Resources and inspiration to **help schools grow**, curated by Digistorm