





# GET YOUR ASSOCIATION APP IN GEAR

**T**hey're not just for meetings. That's right. Some association apps are more than session schedules and speaker profiles.

More associations are treating mobile apps as a hub for all their member resources. More and more mobile app strategies combine content delivery, networking, on-demand education, job listings, resource libraries, and other offerings to grow member engagement year-round and to reach new and increasingly dispersed audiences.

"We have developed mobile apps for associations for 10-plus years, but we've seen the largest growth in app adoption and use in the past 18 months," says Katie Atkinson, president of Results Direct, which produces mobile apps for

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ASSOCIATIONS ARE  
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BY HEATHER SWINK, CAE

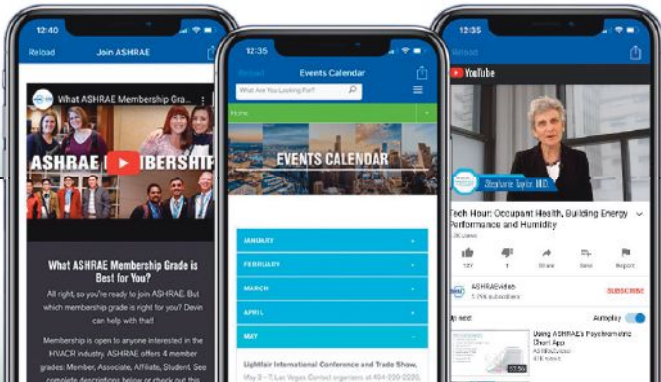
associations. "We believe this growth is the result of expanded reach from virtual events and increased demand from members for engagement opportunities."

The spike in app adoption also correlates with where members spend significant time. According to a July 2021 report from Statista, people spend five hours a day on their mobile devices. Nearly 90% of that time is spent within apps, notes an April 2020 report from eMarketer.

## **Year-Round Offerings, System Integration**

One key strategy to get members to spend some of that mobile device time with their apps is year-round engagement.

# 70% OF THE TIME SPENT ON DIGITAL MEDIA IS COMPLETED IN AN APP.



## THAT'S 89% OF TOTAL MOBILE MINUTES.

Source: 2017-2022 App Annie Economy Forecast

The American Association of Heating, Refrigerating & Air-Conditioning Engineers' ASHRAE 365 provides year-round updates on all things ASHRAE, including industry news, professional development courses, a job board, social media feeds, volunteer resources, member-to-member messaging, exclusive video content for CE credit, and events.

Using apps for only meetings or publications isn't enough. Associations that experience high app adoption and engagement rates are offering multiple reasons for repeat and continual visits.

These offerings include push notifications and alerts, newsfeeds of association and industry content, personalized and tailored content, on-demand learning and continuing education unit tracking, networking communities or discussion groups, job listings, event calendars, member directories, advocacy tools, and exclusive app-only content and videos.

The American Association of Heating, Refrigerating & Air-Conditioning Engineers' member app provides year-round content updates on all things ASHRAE, including events and opportunities for members to connect and find resources. The association, which serves more than 50,000 members in 132 countries, launched the ASHRAE 365 app several years ago, yet downloads and usage grows notably with each new feature the association adds. About 26,000 people — more than half of ASHRAE's membership — have downloaded ASHRAE 365.

Recent additions include advanced communications, content delivery, and networking features. ASHRAE uses a vendor template but controls branding, content, and menus. The app also integrates with its

association management system (AMS) for easy member personalization as well as targeted messaging and content delivery.

The 5,000-plus-member British Orthopaedic Association says its BOA member app had tremendous uptake within the first several months of launching because of its clear vision as well as focused, multichannel marketing of the benefits to members. As a result, the app has about 2,900 downloads — more than half of its membership — and a 100% adoption rate at its Annual Congress.

More than 9,300 users visited the app the second month after its launch. The app provides timely updates and year-round content for members and includes news, regulatory updates, standards and guidance, policy information, and access to continuing professional development records and BOA Annual Congress sessions. It also integrates with BOA's content management system (CMS) and learning management system (LMS).

Building apps with system integration in mind is another key to success, says Darrin Jillson, technology manager for Walsworth, a mobile app vendor for associations.

"When an app is integrated with an AMS, CMS, or LMS, personalized content and push notifications can be tailored for smaller engaged groups of members," Jillson says. "When the information is timely and

## MIND YOUR Ps, Qs, AND UX AND UIs

Your app functionality affects your brand reputation, customer retention, and ROI. Google reports that poor user experience leads 28% of users to reduce or stop purchasing from a brand, and 29% of users will search for your competitors.

Mobile apps that provide a positive user experience offer the following characteristics:

<p><b>USEFUL</b> Fulfill the user's needs and pain points</p>	<p><b>USABLE</b> Easy to navigate and complete desired actions</p>
<p><b>DESIRABLE</b> Evoke positive emotions and delight users</p>	<p><b>FINDABLE</b> Information is simple to find</p>
<p><b>ACCESSIBLE</b> Provide the same experience regardless of who is using the app</p>	<p><b>CREDIBLE</b> Present your brand as trusted and credible</p>

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relevant, members are more likely to interact with it. We are seeing targeted notifications and content being used effectively through system integration.”

System integration works because of how associations deliver member benefits. Members engage with an association through content delivery such as education, continuing professional development, advocacy, publications, and industry news. Typically, this content is delivered through a CMS, LMS, CRM, or a combination of these systems.

Many member apps are integrating with these systems, using the data and content there to brand and personalize content, communities, training, and to target push notifications based on member type, career stage, and other demographics, says J. Mark Wallach, manager of mobile business development for Results Direct.

Associations with complex technical needs may use application programming interfaces (APIs) to coordinate their many tools, especially when it comes to their AMS, Wallach says. Associations may want to build deeper app integration with their existing systems if they find a high percent of their members access system-based content in mobile settings.

## Strategy and Analytics

Associations must plan strategically for a member app. It requires understanding members’ needs and driving functionality around frequent and quick tasks that they’ll want to do on their mobile

# MAKE YOUR APP KICK ASS

Keep these top two tips in mind when customizing your association app:

**1** Optimize your app for voice search and control, as more users avoid touching their smartphones in public situations.

**2** Invest in in-app and app store ads to increase your mobile engagement and drive more conversions.

devices, Atkinson says. To develop a successful app, an association should ask these three key questions:

- + What do we provide our members that is unique?
- + What are the top three things that members come to our association to do?
- + What content and features will members want to access repeatedly on mobile?

Assembling the right strategic team is essential for asking and answering the right questions, says Amy Repke, vice presi-

dent of communications and marketing for the 42,000-member Community Associations Institute serving volunteers; property and community managers; and service providers of homeowners’ associations, condominium communities, and co-ops around the world.

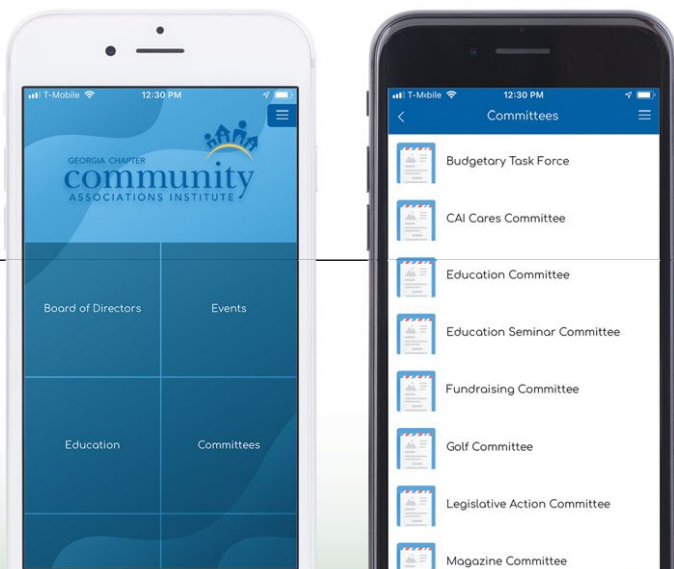
“When developing your app, assemble all your key people. Think about all the key players in the organization that need to be there: marketing, finance, education, etc.,” Repke says. “We learned quickly everyone needs a seat at the table. It’s a bigger lift than some people may think.”

Being paperless at its annual events was the initial mission of CAI’s app. As the association prepares to return to in-person events, the app offers contactless features such as digital registrant bags, business card exchanges, and exhibitor QR scanning. The app goes beyond events to on-demand education access through the app.

“There is a lot of room for us to grow with the way we offer education and training, and how we deliver content with our members through apps. We consider how we can get a past event to our members and get them to access it in a way they want,” Repke says.

Engaging content and visual appeal also play an important role in enticing member engagement.

“The copy must be super engaging and audience-specific to get people excited to take action and get FOMO,” Repke says. “We also



**The Community Associations Institute’s app, created with Event-Mobi, can be customized to serve individual chapters, of which CAI has more than 60. The apps can include events calendars, member directories, and member networking opportunities.**

**BY 2022, THERE WILL BE**  
**258,000,000,000**  
**ANNUAL MOBILE APP DOWNLOADS,**  
**A 45% INCREASE FROM 2017.**

Source: 2017-2022 App Annie Economy Forecast

incorporate a lot of videos and images of members to make the app visually appealing. We take a lot of pride in showcasing our images versus using stock images. Our members like to see each other. It gives them great pride.”

Fully monetizing its app was also a goal of CAI, which it has achieved through sponsored sessions, recordings, and pages, as well as banner ads and promoted push notifications.

CAI measures the app’s success, in part, by the app adoption rate or number of downloads. CAI’s three signature meetings — Annual Conference and Exposition, CEO-MC Retreat, and Law Seminar — saw 74%, 88%, and 94% app adoption rates, respectively. CAI also tracks app engagement, number of social shares and one-on-one messages, most viewed content, most downloaded handouts, and banner impressions.

The Association for Talent Development’s award-winning ATD Publications app gives users access to three high-profile publications. The app, which won AM&P’s 2020 EXCEL Silver Award for the Digital Media: Mobile Application (Other) category, launched in 2015 as an extended member benefit for ATD’s flagship monthly publication, *TD* magazine.

Now it gives users the convenience of reading multiple publications in one easy-to-use platform from their phone or tablet.

“The goal was to help readers have access to the magazine any time or any place they needed



**Designing a great  
member survey takes  
experience and expertise.**

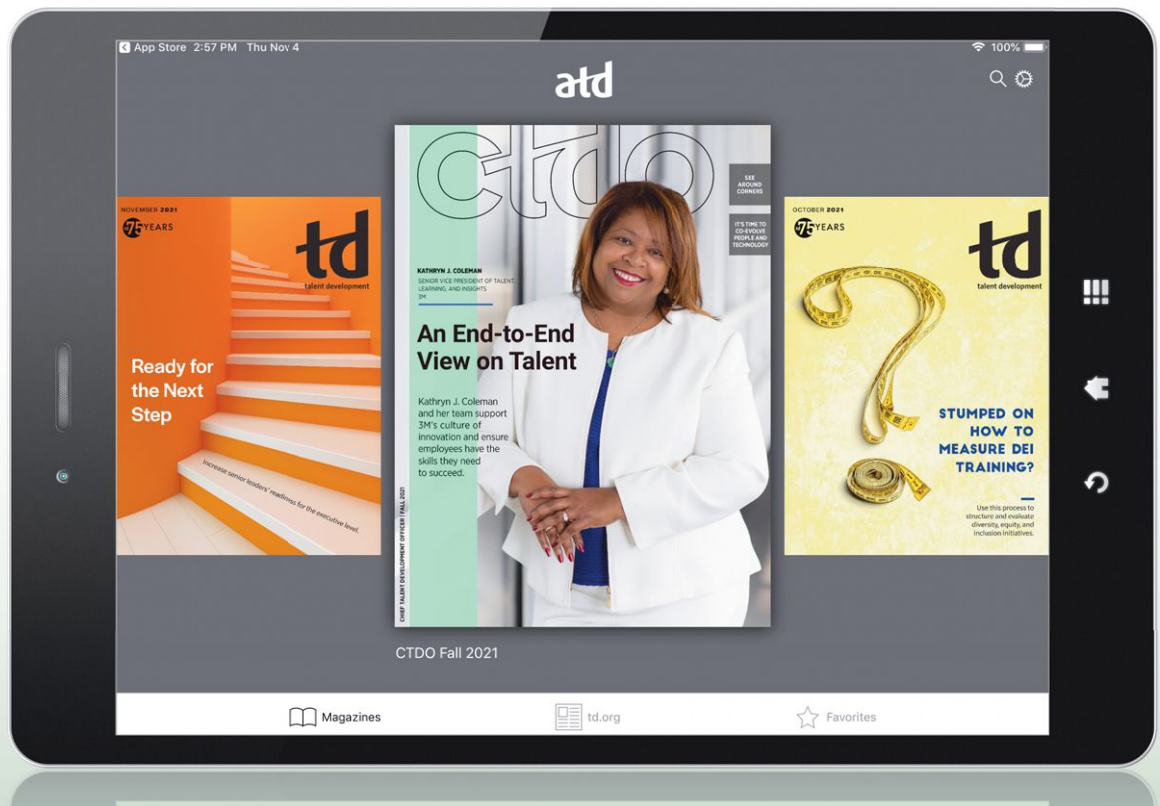
Trust Readex Research to take your information needs, craft a great questionnaire and get it right the first time. When your survey is done, we’ll be with you to make sure you understand the numbers and put them to work for your association.

**Let’s get started today!**





The Association for Talent Development's award-winning ATD Publications app gives users access to three high-profile publications: ATD's flagship monthly publication, *TD* magazine; its quarterly publication for C-suite talent development leaders, *CTDO*; and ATD's State of the Industry Report.



it. Secondly, the ATD team is continually looking at new ways to leverage technology. The app sprang from that core mindset,” says Sarah Halgas, director of production, editorial, and creative for ATD.

When ATD launched its quarterly publication for C-suite talent development leaders, *CTDO*, the ATD Publications app was its natural home. ATD’s State of the Industry Report (SOIR), an annual research-based review of talent development benchmarks and trends, is also now part of the app.

“As we continue to develop our multimedia efforts, we are finding ways to incorporate those assets into the app. Currently we are incorporating animation in both *TD* and *CTDO* and audio content in *CTDO*,” Halgas says.

The app also includes bonus content in the digital version of *TD* magazine, such as playful, attention-grabbing infographics that match the article artwork. *TD* and *CTDO* have different fonts to help differentiate the magazines. *CTDO* also includes commissioned illustrations and photography to maintain a high-end look.

ATD measures the app’s success by monitoring app downloads, engagement, and awareness and continues to refine its efforts to ensure readers have a good user experience with the app. ATD also attracts nonmembers and nonsubscribers by enabling them to access three articles before being prompted to log in.

“It gives them a taste of our content and steers them to become members or subscribe to a magazine,” Halgas says.

## If You Build It, Will They Come?

Is it time for you to develop an app or shift a little-used app into a more prominent platform?

First, associations should check their Google analytics to find the percentage of people who access their website from a mobile device, says Results Direct’s Wallach. If it’s more than 50%, then the association should consider implementing a mobile app.

Associations can choose an app to support their events or members, or both. Associations choosing a member app with event capabilities will save significant money over the cost of separate apps and will find it easier to manage, Wallach says.

Ongoing monitoring of member preferences and habits as well as future forecasting are also important when considering whether to begin or modify a mobile app strategy, Repke says.

“We are constantly evaluating where we need to be today, tomorrow, and five years from now,” Repke says. “We have new generations of attorneys and community managers. They are bringing with them new ways that they work. They don’t want a printed catalog or 100 pages of documents.

They want to access everything from their phone.

“Our decisions to enhance our mobile apps are dependent on meeting members where they are accessing content and our benefits. Right now, that’s on their mobile devices.” **S**



Heather Swink, CAE, is an independent writer, editor, and marketer. Although a former newspaper reporter and print magazine editor, she now consumes most of her news through mobile apps.

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