

A guide to Mobile & In-App advertising for small businesses

Introduction to mobile & in-app advertising

The mobile and in-app industry in the UK is huge - there are 59 million smartphone users in the country and 3.8 hours per day are spent across 25 apps. More time is spent on mobile than any other medium. Research shows that consumers are highly engaged in-app, and can spend more money and become more loyal to a brand via the app environment. It is the perfect vehicle to communicate with your consumers.


There are several ways to engage with these audiences. Advertise on another company's app or mobile web platform. Mobile web operates in a similar way to desktop web - but considerations need to be taken for the screen size and user experience. Large file sizes can eat up a consumer's data allowance and negatively impact their experience with your brand - so there are key creative considerations.

In the UK there are numerous free to play and paid-for apps, many of which have advertising opportunities built into them - from simple banner style creatives to more integrated partnership opportunities.

Alternatively, you can develop your own app to directly engage with consumers. Apps give businesses the ability to truly achieve brand loyalty, enhance customer experience, personalise consumers' journeys and increase sales. Why? Because you have the ability to understand your consumers on a personal level - their habits, how they interact with your brand, how they like to receive messaging from your brand and how often. If you have the ability to understand your consumers, you have the ability to influence.

What marketing challenges is it best suited to?

We all spend so much time with a mobile phone in our hand, dropping into different apps for whatever content we need at that very moment. The key for any brand in this space is to make the advertising interesting and in some way complementary to what a user is doing. A great opportunity is when a user is playing a mobile game. You can "reward" them for their time with a great piece of interesting and relevant content - such as a new level in their game - to keep them engaged.



Most consumers don't just use an app - they will browse, research and purchase across both the web and via apps. It can be hard to understand who the user is across both platforms and for an advertiser to not waste money promoting a product that someone has already bought. It's therefore important to ensure you can connect the user across both apps and the web.

How to reach your audience

With over 80% of the UK population owning a smartphone and the majority having numerous apps installed, you're sure to find plenty of potential consumers for your business via in-app advertising.

Apps typically have much higher volumes of logged-in users with deep user journeys. This is a great combination for understanding consumer behaviour and segmenting users into useful categories for advertising. The targeting options available in-app have many similarities to web environments. You can use demographic data - such as gender or age - as well as behavioural data based on a user's current or past interests - such as people looking at buying a new car or fitness enthusiasts.


People are rarely without their mobile phone which offers some unique benefits for mobile advertising. You can reach customers at the right time, with the added ability to do advanced location-based targeting. Combine these with demographic and behavioural data and you'll be off to a great start.

In-app mobile advertising also benefits from some great secondary level retargeting opportunities. Due to the collection of Device IDs when a user is served content, the in-app world can then run sequential targeting to these users and re-message them later.

One important difference to keep in mind for mobile campaigns is that the technologies used are often different to apps, so data collected on web platforms may not be easily used in apps. However, this does not mean you cannot promote a non-app business in-app. To ensure you can find the right customers and show them the right message you will need to ensure the data you use can be used in-app. Thankfully there are lots of apps out there that can create and share this kind of data with you, as well as other data platforms.

Creative considerations

Whether your ad is in-app or on a mobile site, keep it simple. Your message should be clear and concise to ensure the best chance of it registering with a potential customer. It's also a good idea to focus one campaign on a specific message, if you try and say too much at once you risk not getting anything across. One of the biggest differences about advertising on mobile is the screen size, but just because the amount of space is smaller it doesn't mean your ambitions should be.



Don't just use a web banner on a mobile site, and ensure any web based campaign has dedicated mobile creative. From an interaction perspective think of fingers not cursors, use clean simple imagery and tactile call to actions ("tap" not "click" here for example). Expect a "sound off" experience, so consider subtitles if narrative is critical to convey the branding message. Like all digital advertising, ensure your brand is in every frame. Also, when using video, consider a portrait experience vs a typical TV 16:9 format.

Many apps will accept display formats that are also found on web platforms, so if you already run banner ads on the web then you should be able to use these in-app without any changes. However, whether you already have banners or not, it is important to look at the options available to make the most out of the in-app environment.

Apps often offer a very fast user experience so the time a user spends in front of your ad may be short, therefore it's critical to land your message or engage the user in the first few seconds.

Advertisers can often work with app specialists to create immersive gamified experiences, allowing the brand to be brought to life as a mini game - assume a 2 week turnaround on build after the campaign is signed off.


Video is one of the biggest areas of growth in mobile advertising and is a great way to raise awareness of your brand and tell a story that would not be possible in other formats. One of the most important considerations should be time - you don't have much of it.

Native ads are neither new or complicated but they do offer numerous benefits, especially in-app. To make a native ad often only requires an image, some text and a logo. This simplicity allows you to quickly and easily create multiple creatives and then test these against different users to see what delivers the best results. Importantly there are also some apps that will only run native ads due to the performance benefits they offer, helping to keep apps running fast.

If possible use a mix of different formats. Native ads are typically better for direct response, video for brand awareness and banners are somewhere in the middle. Within each format you should also ensure you have some different versions, this could be as simple as changing an image or the call to action. The combination of different creative formats and messages with different strategies is incredibly powerful and typically the best way to maximise your budget and drive results.

Media budget considerations

One of the reasons that digital marketing is so successful is the flexibility it offers, not just in terms of the type of campaigns you can run to a variety of different goals, but also in terms of budget. Many platforms have low minimum thresholds for spend, which allows businesses to start marketing or trial a new platform without a large financial outlay. This flexibility extends into the lifetime of the campaign, meaning that if you want to change budgets - up or down - or even pause a campaign altogether, this should not be a problem.



An important consideration here is that the minimum threshold to start working on a platform may not necessarily be a realistic guide for what your first campaign budget should be. What you need to think about is your desired outcome.

Say, for example, you want to get people to come to your website and then look at a specific page, you will need a reasonable volume to work out which strategies or creatives are actually working for you.

Keeping this in mind, you should work back from that goal, factoring in the marketing funnel and likely drop off at each step (e.g. impressions, clicks, website visits and conversions). This will allow you to calculate how much spend is required to create a meaningful campaign.

A typical minimum spend in mobile apps would be around £5k test spend. In the video space this could buy you 166,000 completed video views and a likely 3,000 clicks through to your mobile web page (assuming an average 2% click-through-rate). This may or may not include a creative build cost, so check with your vendor. Some offer the creative build as part of the media space investment.

A medium spend would range between £50 - £100k - which could get you a bespoke gamified and more immersive experience - or a simple campaign that reaches more people.

Technical considerations

One of the most important areas to consider is measurement and attribution. Without these two elements, you will be in the dark about campaign performance. It's always important to work with an independent attribution and measurement company, one that doesn't have any interest in buying media. Think of it like a referee in a football match. You need someone to make sure everyone you're working with is being fair, equal and "playing the game" correctly.

Make sure you establish clear goals at the start of a campaign and that you can measure them. They could be anything from visits to a certain page on your site to purchases above a certain value. If you do have multiple goals then it's important to prioritise them, as not all may be achievable at the same time. Once set up, check in on your campaigns on a daily/weekly basis to see what is or isn't working and then make decisions accordingly to ensure you're on track to meet your objectives.

Take some time to think about what kind of consumers would be right for your business or product. Once you have worked this out you can create some different strategies using targeting aimed at each group. This will allow you to better understand how they engage with your brand and test any assumptions you might have about the consumers you were looking for. This last part is very important, sometimes the "right" consumers for a brand may not be who we thought, so make sure you analyse the reporting metrics from your campaign and optimise based on the findings.

With thanks to the businesses who authored this guide:



AppsFlyer is a mobile measurement and attribution company. Working with start-ups and Enterprise Advertisers, helping them understand the Life Time Value of users. This is done by making it super easy for marketers to analyse and act on their App data, whether it be with external partners or their own media.



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