

By
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CASE STUDY

Building mobile market research

Two Saskatoon companies have partnered to pioneer a new model for qualitative research, based on mobile collaboration.

Background: itracks, a Saskatoon-based software developer and market research firm, was one of the first companies to conduct market research online. Founded in 1996, the company launched with a virtual focus group solution, now holds a U.S. Patent for online focus groups and has been ranked among the top 10 most innovative market research companies in the world.

In collaboration with Saskatoon-neighbour, CollegeMobile, an award winning mobile application developer, itracks recently introduced an innovative new mobile app that further breaks down the barriers of traditional “brick and mortar” focus group qualitative research by enabling researchers (and their clients) to interact directly with consumers via mobile.

“We saw great value in being able to allow research participants to capture product experiences [while]

actually in the moment or environment that they’re experiencing them,” Weber explained. “It’s a much more convenient methodology to engage population segments that have demanding schedules and limited availability.”

App-building

In early 2012, itracks hired CollegeMobile to help them build a mobile version of their online software. CollegeMobile built the app from the ground up and worked with itracks software engineers to ensure

smooth integration of “all the moving parts” in itracks’ complicated software back-end, Chad Jones, CollegeMobile’s CEO said.

“The architecture of the app definitely became a challenge,” Weber said. “It was something very new to the market and [there was] a lot of communication back and forth between our company and their company. It was great to be able to leverage the expertise of CollegeMobile and have our developers involved in the process.”

Built for iPhone, iPad and Android mobile devices, the app, which was released on September 18, enables users to review questions and post responses (text, video or pictures) even if they find themselves without a WiFi or 3G connection.

“The app itself works while the user is offline too,” Jones said. “Users interact with it, answer a question and when they reconnect, the app loads [that information] back up to the server so the user is able to use it in remote areas.”

itracks had at least one client who was thankful to have the mobile app when they lost power during the recent Hurricane Sandy calamity. The client couldn’t access their computer, but was able to download the app to a smartphone and complete their online focus group project on time.

“The user is always in the moment even if they’re not connected to the Internet,” Jones said.

Benefits

“Usage on phones is starting to creep past usage on computers,” Jones said. “What that means is that [mobile] apps are going to become more important in [creating] a good experience for customers.”

The mobile version of itracks’ software aims to make it easier for market research-

ers to penetrate population segments (i.e. doctors, lawyers, business executives) that are typically hard to reach because of busy schedules.

“The app is really nice because they can easily follow the discussion at

their convenience and [it enables them to] give timely feedback,” Weber said. “There’s increased engagement from the client observers and participants, and it adds a lot of flexibility and convenience for the research moderator.”

“There are other qualitative research apps in the marketplace, but this would definitely be the leading one right now because it allows for an interactive discussion to take place,” she explained.

Because the product is still fairly new to the market it’s difficult to tell how much of an impact it will have on itracks’ business. Weber said their customers will notice the main productivity and cost benefits of the app, while itracks might actually incur slightly higher support costs.

Despite that, Weber said she’s confident the new app will foster “a high penetration of usage” and will become “the preferred mode of participating in qualitative research.”

It will take time for customers to adjust their workflows and incorporate mobile capabilities into their research process, but Weber said more companies are already knocking on their door with interest and that “itracks is expecting to have an increased user base as a result.” ■



Chad Jones, CEO,
CollegeMobile



Garnette Weber,
director of
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