

OneAppy: An Interactive Platform Providing Novel Marketing Channels and Promoting Product and Services to the Tourism Industry



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Abstract Nowadays, marketers are required to rethink their marketing strategies, and provide innovative approaches, based on new communication technologies, alongside the classic channels of business promotion. OneAppy is a platform based on a new eMarketing model, aiming to provide valuable marketing channels and tools for promoting products/services. After an analysis on related technologies, the architecture and services of the OneAppy platform are presented in respect to the targeted market domains. With OneAppy, a business may develop a powerful web and mobile presence with minimum cost/time and communicate with its clients interactively, offering them information, suggestions, and updates regarding everything that is related to offered services.

Keywords eMarketing · eTourism · CMS · Mobile marketing model

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1 Introduction

The evolution to a knowledge-based economy and the vast development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are leading the tourism industry to find novel methods for marketing and for business in general [1, 2]. More specifically, with the grown of Web 2.0 technologies (i.e., video/photo sharing, blogging, social bookmarking and networking), the interaction between consumers has experienced massive acceleration, simplifying their accumulation and participation. Participation-based technologies (i.e. push notifications, on demand content, chat rooms, wikis, forums, social networks, etc.) allow users to interact and collaborate with each other as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community [3].

Therefore, marketers need nowadays to rethink marketing strategies, using innovative approaches based on ICTs, alongside the classic channels of business promotion (traditional media such as TV, radio, newspaper). The most promising innovative marketing practices that leverage on Web 2.0 technologies are: viral marketing, buzz marketing, mobile marketing and social media marketing. The common characteristic of these marketing techniques is the exploitation of the personalization information and the word-of-mouth phenomenon in online environments. In particular, users benefit from targeted news, information and entertainment in an online community, and consider suggestions and recommendations as an important source of information [4].

In this context, this paper proposes the need to adapt modern eMarketing strategies not only to Web 2.0 technologies, but also to complex user's online behaviours with an emphasis on adaptations to sub-cultures derived from lifestyles (e.g. healthy lifestyle) or specific market domains like innovative and cultural tourism. A tool developed according to this adaptation model is OneAppy, a mobile application framework offering a new approach to the communication/interaction between tourism and lifestyle businesses and customer communities (clubs, societies, etc.). Following a user-centred design approach, the overall architecture of the application is presented in the following sections, along with a short definition of the offered services.

2 User's Online Behaviour, Cultural Adaptation and Influencers

Previous studies have investigated how theories like the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [5] and the Theory of Fow (ToF) [6] are being used to provide interpretation for observed consumer online behaviours [7, 8]. The TPB has been applied to analyses of the relationships between people's identity, attitudes and behaviours [9] in market domains like public relations and advertising. On the other hand, the ToF describes the mental state under which users perform stimulating activities like

videogames, or social networking under a feeling of fully immersion and involvement.

Apart from the need to adapt the cultural content of the online services [7], there is the need to adapt to specific users or groups and this adaptation process can make the difference between failure and success of a business model [10]. People who follow a specific lifestyle share similar needs, attitudes and beliefs and thus their behaviour as customers may have strong similarities. Those ‘subcultures’ created by user groups differentiate them from the mother culture to which they belong. Occasionally, brands foster the subculture making process and help create values/norms that are distinct from those held by other groups. Moreover, the market has witnessed social media influencers becoming a driver of consumer purchases, especially in the lifestyle and tourism market [11]. Having more than half of individuals (54%) using the Internet for social networking [12], it is derived that social media today allow more efficient ways to build relationships with existing and possible new customers [13].

Overall, it has become very difficult for most brands, especially small companies, to reach a critical mass of customers using the techniques explained before, namely the development of subcultures related to their products and the recruitment of social media influencers, due to budget and policy restrictions. Thus a new model is needed to help small brands to run marketing campaigns on the Internet, to be able to adapt their contents to the needs of specific existing or possibly new customer communities and make direct links between online activities and their products and services.

3 Existing Solutions for Content Adaptation and Social Media

There is a plethora of Social media marketing tools present today that can offer cost-effective online marketing strategies. For example, Buffer (buffer.com) can help businesses and marketing teams to schedule posts and check analytics for all social accounts in one place. However, those tools are platform dependent (like platform plugins), or they provide simple functionalities like MeetEdgar (meet Edgar.com) used to recycle old posts, or SocialOomph (www.socialoomph.com) to upload a long list of blog posts in a single text file and let them be randomly distributed at certain time-based intervals on selected platforms. More advanced tools are equipped with Machine Learning (ML) techniques to discover hidden patterns in user’s behaviours, find the best audience and the way to update ads for better investments. Such a tool is the Adext AI (www.adext.com) which can run thousands of simulations to discover the best choices and support in decision making processes.

Some of the existing solutions are optimized for mobile devices. Creating mobile marketing campaigns is made possible with a wide range of tools, starting with simple SMS message posting apps like TextMagic (www.textmagic.com/), to more advanced tools like Snapchat (www.snapchat.com) which is used to promote

products, engage with clients and run polls and contests. Similarly, Mobile Roadie (mobileroadie.com) offers app creation, media file sharing, RSS news feed, and polls creation. Marketers recognize the strength of mobile eMarketing tools which allow media integration, because it allows them to reach their target demographics throughout the day [14].

4 OneAppy Platform and Features

OneAppy was created on the top of a new eMarketing framework model to help small companies and brands related to lifestyle and tourism to develop a powerful web and mobile presence with minimum cost, time and effort. As a tool, it can be used by social media marketers and people who market their own business to communicate with their clients interactively, offering them information, suggestions, and updates.

The underlying model makes it easy to create and maintain relatively small, but very targeted social media channels (private marketplaces), to adapt the online contents to the needs of specific customer communities and to develop long-term relationships with them. This eMarketing approach can provide equal chances to brands in order to maintain their position in the competition, or to scale their marketing campaign. The proposed architecture provides a new communication and marketing channel, based on state-of-the-art technologies as explained in the following sections.

4.1 Overall System Architecture

OneAppy is an intelligent and customizable platform based on web technologies (HTML5, JavaScript, PHP7, WebSockets, cloud computing). The main architectural components are (Fig. 1):

- A *mobile application* providing the main interaction point (User Interfaces) with end-customers, and a placeholder for multiple micro-apps, called Appies. Micro-apps are small, task-specific, consumer-oriented, and offer highly targeted functionality, letting users perform a handful of easy tasks instantly (Fig. 2). In comparison to the usual enterprise mobile applications, micro apps offer an experience that is more consumer-focused and are easy-to-use.
- A backend *Content Management System (CMS)* used by business users to create/update Appies, and provide personalized bidirectional communication to customers (Figs. 3 and 4).
- A *gamification component* designed to maintain and run customer loyalty campaigns based on a point-based award system.

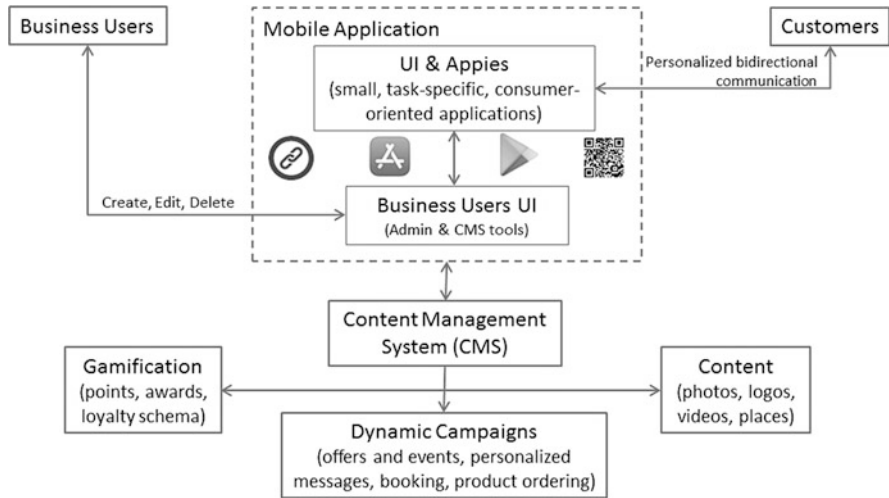


Fig. 1 Overall system architecture of the OneAppy platform



Fig. 2 User interfaces of the OneAppy mobile application

- The *content database* in which photos, logos, videos, categories, places and content in general are being stored.
- *Dynamic Campaigns* container for models targeting in a more accurate way their customer base, creating offers and events, sending personalized messages, making services available for booking and products for ordering.

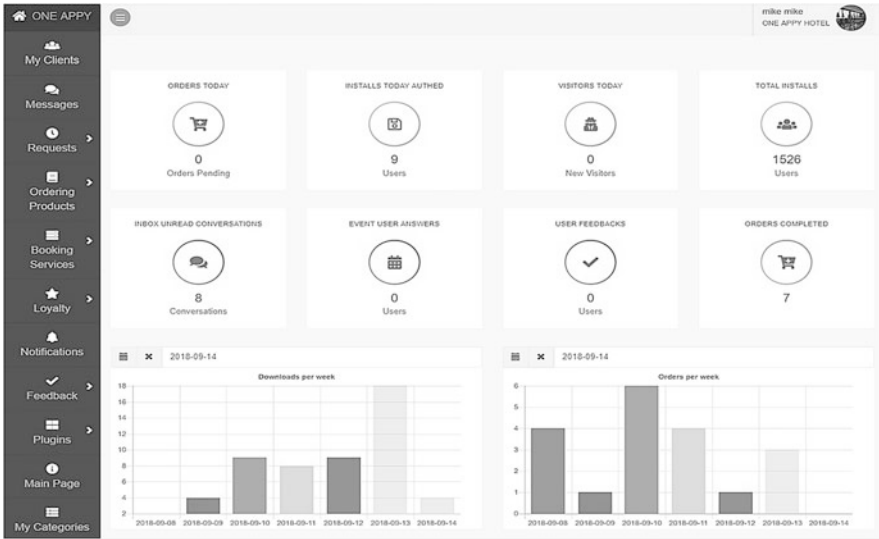


Fig. 3 A view of the CMS UI (statistics reports and service management screens)

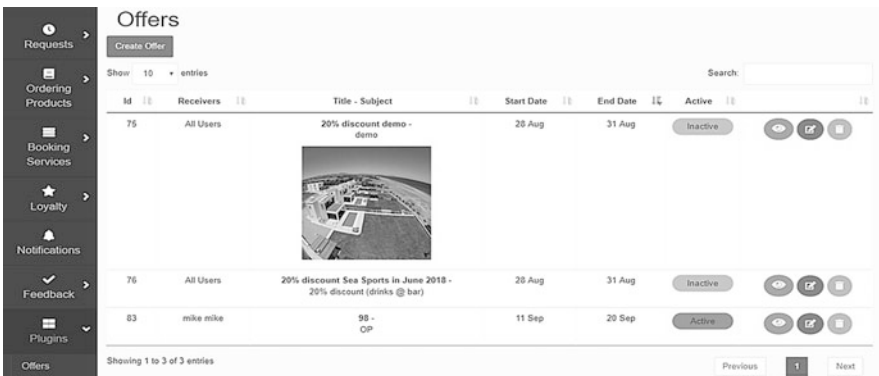


Fig. 4 Another view of the CMS UI (targeted campaigns to specific clients)

4.2 Features and Services

With OneAppy, no technical skills are required for the development of a mobile micro app. Business users can login with their credentials in the user friendly CMS, and proceed with Appies development in a very easy way. Appies are ready to run by the very first minute and they can be distributed to end-customers through multiple ways: (1) click on the web link shared with them, (2) download OneAppy from the

App store or Play store (Android and iOS) and (3) scan the QR code derived from the CMS.

By navigating in a micro app, customers can receive useful insights and services in a personalized way, while strengthening their loyalty to a company. The flexible functionality of OneAppy allows marketers to create dynamic campaigns targeting in a more accurate way their engaged customer base (Fig. 4).

Any change regarding a micro app can be completed at minimum effort and time. Updates are automatically delivered to the customers through own communication channels. The platform adapts to each user's conditions and preferences, and integrates the functionalities presented in Table 1.

5 Market Positioning and Benefits

OneAppy is an innovative marketing tool that can be applied to a diverse set of industries and markets, and especially the tourism, cultural heritage destinations and the hotels industry. It can provide unique experiences to guests and distant or onsite visitors, and promote products and services. Independent of a business capacity, OneAppy can be dynamically adjusted to specific needs, offering an easy way to customers to view products and services, and send their requests. Customers can be continuously informed about offers or events taking place (e.g. an offer of discount for cultural site entrance tickets, cultural events, accommodation), can browse a local travel guide with drive-me features, rate their experiences via a feedback form and more. Moreover, they may receive and redeem loyalty points for their purchases, and provide feedback in a simple and useful way with respect to modern Gamification principles.

On the other hand, business users can create a mobile application for their business within a few hours and with no technical skills; adapt the info-to-present to communities of online users; describe products and services, create offers and events on demand, initiate and maintain two ways communication with their existing and new potential customers; and receive online satisfaction feedback from them.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, the OneAppy architecture and services was presented, with regard to the tourism and lifestyle industry. The proposed framework is not a simple marketing automation or a site monitoring app, but an advanced tool for promoting products and services across multiple channels, and enhancing customer experience. Focus was given to the adoption of a new eMarketing model to assist businesses and customers to develop a mutual community [15, 16], and benefit from a wide range of mobile marketing functionalities. Based on state-of-the-art technologies, OneAppy

Table 1 Adaptation to user/customer's needs (individuals and/or communities)

Service title	Description	Features
Book services	Businesses can promote their services online, and provide audience the option to reserve their preferences, thus increase sales as well as implementation flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited number of service categories with unlimited services per category • Support of multiple file formats (photos, text) • Organize and brand services properly • Services calendar within a timing framework and provide audience the option to book prefer session • Notify customers instantly about the launching of new services or offers • Receive online reservations from customers 24/7 • Offer a large choice of delivery and payment options
Gamification	Customers can be rewarded through flexible loyalty programs (engagement and sales). The award mechanism is based on an internal point-based economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect points by interacting with the platform and payments • Adjust the gamification rules according to the needs • Support of different loyalty categories (gold, silver, bronze) • Connect product ordering/booking with points earning • Provide the option to pay through points redemption • Design Quests (special campaigns) with discounts, extra points for a period of time • Monitor customer's status and balance • Provide extra ad-hoc motivation.
Order products	Products can be sold online to highly targeted and engaged audiences, thus increasing conversions, revenues and profits for a business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlimited product categories and products per category • Support of multiple file formats (photos, text) • Organize and brand products properly • Create a product catalogue (accessible to the mobile app audience and to everyone through the Internet) • Notify customers instantly whenever they launch new products or offers • Receive online orders from clients on a 24/7 basis • Manage orders through the OneAppy's intuitive interface
Instant messaging	Instant messaging empowers organized bidirectional communication efficiently, immediately and safely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full messaging functionality though a user friendly UI • Allow customers to receive immediate notification (even before they read messages)

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Service title	Description	Features
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send messages across groups or individuals • Plan messages for delivery now or at any time • Maintain control and history across all data
Provide feedback/reviews	Users provide their view about businesses simply and quickly (insight into important aspects and improvements)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create simple categories including the business areas business users want customers to evaluate • Structure questions within each category • Provide an easy-to-rate way (click per question) • Monitor and manage customer’s feedback safely and quickly • Export feedback for further processing

aims to provide a hallmark in marketing technologies adopt to a diverse set of industries.

Our findings are in line with the word of Pentina and Koh [17] who explored the social media marketing strategies and calculated 3 clusters of eMarketing ap-proaches, including one named ‘cautious watchers’ used to describe B2B service providers (like OneAppy) who are characterized by the dominant tactic to create brand communities on their own websites and to monitor chats on social networks. OneAppy goes one step further by taking advantage of the mobile marketing to obtain customer feedback and spreading marketing messages. Moreover, according to other studies which focus on the aptitude and potential of eMarketing applications as influencers of users/customer behavior [18, 19], the proposed framework support an active model of engaging with social media and Web 2.0 technologies.

As Kaplan noted, mobile communication channel will become a truly global reach across countries and demographic groups [20], and thus eMarketing could be the dominant digital marketing model in the near future. The OneAppy plans for the future include the development of more advanced Machine Learning models in order to discover the optimal demographic sub-groups in communities of users/customers and automatically optimize advertisements and message posts multiple times per day.

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