



## **Q&A: Tips for Mobile Event Tech**

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Mobile technology can keep event guests engaged and connected; but like anything else on a planner's agenda, it takes careful consideration. Matt Ford, IT Director with Scotiabank Convention Centre, offers an insider's perspective...

### **Event apps are rising in popularity. What considerations should be made before investing in one for a convention?**

With mobile tools like apps, you need to take into account the venue's wi-fi capabilities, its bandwidth, service costs, and if it has the online infrastructure to handle your crowd and what you have planned. You might be hoping to try something interactive with your app like live polling, wayfinding, or gamification, but if the venue doesn't have the infrastructure and people in place to support that, you're going to run up against some issues.

Some planners don't factor all of this in when they pay a developer to create an app for them, and then it comes to a point where they're going beyond their budget to pay for the infrastructure to run it. These are the things you need to bring up in your early talks with your venue.

### **How do you see these apps being used?**

At first, they were basically a website with an agenda telling people where to be and when. Now, people are realizing you can use these apps for a lot more. There's gamification, where you can use them to give attendees points for going to certain presentations and events, and I've seen organization use apps to hold real-time votes. In one of our most recent conferences, there was a keynote speaker who asked the audience questions and displayed the answers on the stage within seconds. All these ideas are huge for getting people engaged in presentations. Plus, it gives planners an opportunity to provide extra exposure for sponsors on the apps themselves.

**How is event technology advancing overall?**

There's always going to be new technology, but the most significant improvements will be to the way we as venues manage what we already have. It's about enhancing that quality of service by coordinating when and where you need strong wi-fi, prioritizing bandwidth, and using data to find out how people are using their devices and where they're using them most. The real advancement when it comes to technology will be about using software and new skills to deliver the best technical experience we can based on all these factors.

**Speaking of data, what is wi-fi usage reporting and how can it benefit planners?**

Wi-fi usage reporting is something clients are looking for a lot these days - especially ones who run the same event every year and go from centre to centre. It's a report they can request from us at the end of an event that lets them see where wi-fi was used to most, on what devices, and during what times. It gives them a tangible way to see if the money they spent for wi-fi capabilities was worth it, or if next time they could do with more or less.

On another level, wi-fi usage reporting helps organizers drill down into the success of their event by seeing things like if there were more people browsing on their device during certain presentations, which might indicate they weren't all that engaged. Overall, it gives them a detailed look at how wi-fi was used so they can take that to the next venue and better tailor their next event.

**How important is it to have tech people on site during an event?**

It's pretty important, and that goes for everything -- your wi-fi, audio-visual (A/V), network ... everything. You see it time and time again where speakers come up to the podium and spend their time setting up in front of everyone, or a piece of equipment breaks and time is wasted getting it back up. That's why you want to have A/V people in the room who can handle the equipment, work out the problems, and get those presentations underway quickly.

At the end of the day, you're always going to have people who assume things are going to go well so they won't need extra help. What I've learned is that it's always best to plan for the worst and hope for the best.

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