

The *Luxury* of **OUTSOURCING** for *'FREE'*



FOLLOWING FIRTH
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In October last year, Discovery and Dialdirect, in conjunction with the City of JoBurg, launched the Pothole Patrol app, which would allow drivers to report potholes using geolocation data. This wasn't the first time an app of this type had been introduced, and in fact, the Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA) had its own app that offered the same functionality.

Unfortunately, however, the JRA's app became defunct as a result of the fact that it was developed and then left to run itself, with no maintenance or management after it was published. This is a far more common situation than many would think, as many businesses assume that once they have paid for the development of an app, it should just continue working.

THE APP JOURNEY ISN'T AS EASY AS IT SEEMS

While almost every organisation appreciates the need for an app that will allow its customers to interact more directly with the company, few understand the intricacies of making that app an effective interface with the business. A great deal of focus has been placed on the benefits of adding an app to a company's portfolio, but less time has been spent on the challenges and drawback an app can bring if not properly developed and managed.

An example that will be glaringly obvious to most businesspeople, a mobile app is normally built to provide a 24/7 self-service to customers or consumers. So the decision by a company to build a mobile app may have huge implications on a company's internal processes that are not designed to function outside of normal business

hours. How does a company support a customer using their mobile app at 2am when a customer has a query?

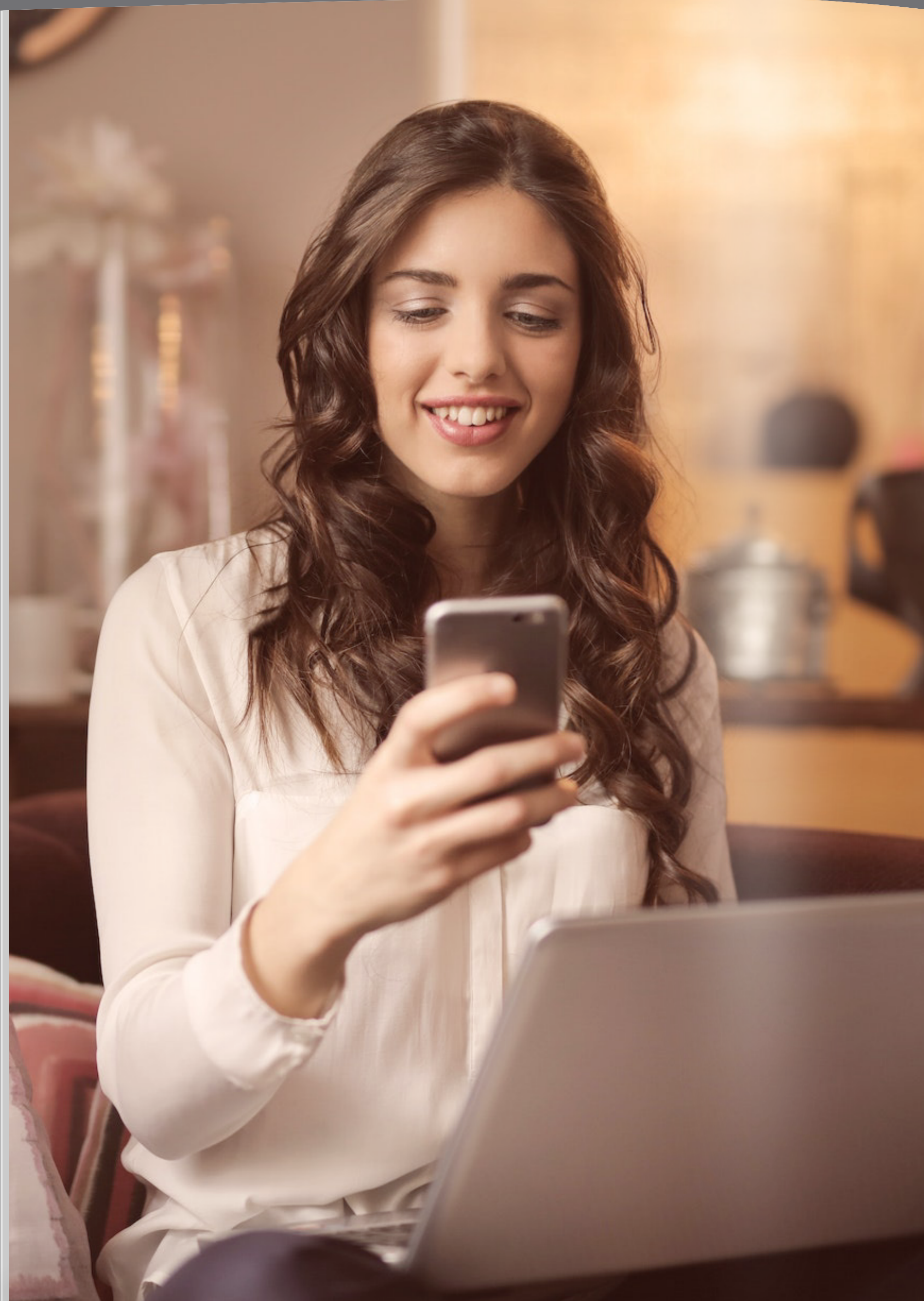
One of the most important things a mobile app offers to consumers is awareness of and communication with your brand. And through that regular interaction with your target market, you're fostering trust. The more your audience trusts you, the more likely they'll be to listen to later sales pitches and even commit to your brand. With an app, you'll demonstrate to your users why they should trust you by showing (rather than telling) what your brand stands for.

Of course, none of this applies if the app regularly doesn't work, if there is no immediate feedback from the business, or if the app only offers limited functionality. When companies pay a once-off fee for an app, they may be getting something that they can publish so they are visible alongside their competitors, but too many get a static product that does nothing for the consumers using the app.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES

The biggest nightmare for any business developing a mobile app is delivering something that their users don't even want. This happens when you approach app development from the wrong perspective. Many businesses fall into the trap of creating an application from their own perspective, and not the perspective of the customer. If a company doesn't seek input from customers and understand what type of features and functionality they would be looking for in a mobile experience, developing an app is a complete waste.

When there is an ongoing service agreement, which should last between three and five years,



the mobile app can be fine-tuned to ensure that it meets customer needs. Similarly, any potential problems relating to performance or integration with business systems can be dealt with as and when they arise. When a mobile app is purchased as a once-off product, these challenges become much bigger headaches that most companies can't resolve themselves, leading to either more expenditure on a failing channel, or a static product that quickly becomes useless.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, what happens if too many people start using your app? What if it takes off faster than you could ever expect? You could be stuck supporting hundreds of thousands of users. Are you prepared for that? The benefit of accommodating rapid growth will more than make up for the cost of ongoing support.

However, the biggest hidden risk lies in the propensity to outsource mobile development to the wrong company. You have to be very careful who you "get into bed with" when it comes to this, and make sure your contract accounts for things like who is responsible for the management of the app, what management entails, and what updates will need to be done in the future. The fact is, most businesses can't afford to develop their mobile apps in-house. As result, they must turn to outside help – which adds a layer of risk to the project.



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CHOOSING THE RIGHT PARTNER

So, how can you avoid choosing the wrong development partner? While there's no single answer that applies to every situation, here's one rule of thumb: Avoid outsourcing for "free".

This can be one of the nastiest traps of mobile app development. These types of projects almost invariably encounter delays, hidden costs and lapses in quality. Occasionally, they're forced to scrap everything that has been done and start all over, or have it replaced with a competitive product that actually works, just like in the case of the JRA app.

A reputable partner that provides ongoing support can mitigate all of these risks. The recurring billing such an agreement carries brings with it more than just support. It offers a guarantee that the app is always relevant, up-to-date, secure, and meets the needs of customers. It is also worthwhile spreading the development risk by ensuring that you pay your mobile app development partner over the three or five your contractual period rather than 80% of the cost upfront or prior to going live with your mobile app.

A mobile app is only as good as its users say it is, and companies that fall into the trap of a "free" app too often fall into the trap of buying something that never gets used. A project of this kind may only cost them a relatively small upfront fee, but it ends up costing them far more in the long-run. The biggest cost, in fact, is the loss of the good opinion of their customers.