

THE NEXT phase of apps is 'round'



JON CARNEY, CEO OF MARVELLOUS says the beginning of the second chapter of app evolution, is what he's calling the 'Round Apps' phase.

Not a day goes by without a brand launching an app. What started in the mid noughties as simple Java brochures – that looked so much nicer than a WAP page – changed overnight with the iPhone, and, crucially, the AppStore. Here we had a place where cool apps could be consumed and found democratically, ostensibly without the need for media promotion.

Apps became part of social currency. Anyone with an iPhone or Android (Google) phone had to prove their worth with the apps they carried as badges of discovery, statements of cool, symbols of connection with the zeitgeist.

But the majority of apps we've seen in the last three years are largely what we call 'flat'. They are simple, quick hit gimmicks, which use a core function of the phone. A few stand out of course think of the stir that iPint caused. But too often they have been just sizzle; now consumers want the sausage.

YOUR INNER SOCIAL LIFE

We're at the beginning of the second phase of app evolution, what I'm calling the phase of 'Round Apps'.

Round Apps present agencies and brands with a way to get closer than ever to their consumers. They enable people's lives, and in return are carried as more than brand trophies by their fans. You let Round Apps into your inner social life – they can connect with functions and, even people within your social network, because you allow them to. They are gateways for brands to get

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closer not only to you, but also your friends.

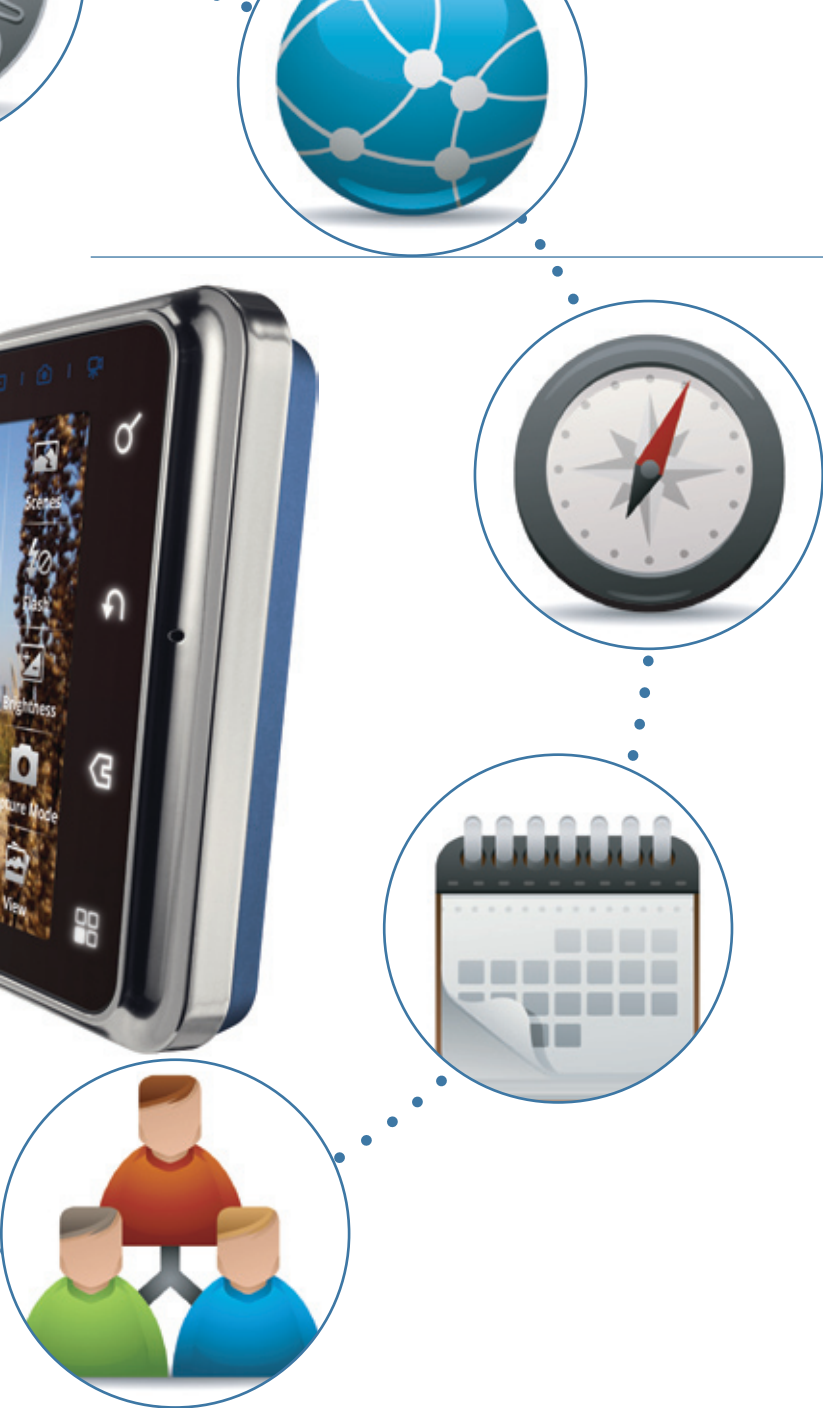
Round Apps work 'around' media. They don't necessarily need a big media push to get started. Instead they rely on being spread across social networks by key influencers and MIPs (mates in pubs).

FROM ROCK STARS TO APP STARS

Round Apps will make brands a bit like music companies of the past. Brands become a 'hits business', apps become the hit singles, usurping the ad campaign that everyone talks about. Apps will be the new currency of the water cooler. We might even see app-stars, people who achieve great wealth and fame through the apps they've created that reach number one on the AppStore.

Brands can reinvent themselves with Round Apps. We've just seen Nike become an authority on urban listings with its True City iPhone app. What's stopping Barclaycard becoming my travel companion, guiding me through all the tricky stages of a foreign business trip? You get the idea. Round Apps allow brands new ways to connect with people, and deliver new services and value. We could even see the staid and prosaic bring a little entertainment and fun into the world.

Mobile companies like Vodafone and Nokia have also adapted to become producers as well as distributors of apps. They have their own app stores, where they facilitate entertainment and utility for their customers.



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TOP FIVE ROUND APPS

adidas, Marathon Tracker. The most applauded and awarded app so far. Winner of a Cannes Lion, Media Week Grand Prix and Webby, the Marathon Tracker allows friends and family to track their loved ones in the Marathon, and follow them around the course. You've also been able to post messages on huge digital displays, just as your runner approaches.

Absolut Drinkspiration. As well being a thing of beauty, the App helps you find drinks to support your mood, the time of day, the weather, by bar type, or background music type, or even by your favourite spirit. And it stores your history of previous concoctions. It's social too – see what users of the app around the globe are making right now, and share your favourites.

Nike True City. Proving apps can extend brands into new areas, True City combines cool-hunter recommendations on new events, images and maps with your location, to find Nike-esque spots in London and Amsterdam. It also publishes direct to your social networks.

Jamie Oliver 20 minute meals. Tapping into the need for quick, simple, good food, Jamie's app combines a clever shopping list function with video demos of the great one in action. Going for gold, it would link selected recipes with social media tools and your friends. Not sure why supermarkets haven't launched one of these.

Momento. Dear Diary, you can put together your most profound thoughts, and then easily broadcast them across the social web? Called a social notebook, that combines a digital diary with a writing App and image/video store. I surmise this kind of thing will be the next development in micro-blogging.

THE IMPACT FOR BRANDS

Brands need to start thinking how they can connect with consumers in a 'round' way. How they deliver something of such value that people will use it and share it. Consumers can even allow brands to benefit from the social multiplier effect where if I post my brand app usage on Facebook on average 150 people will be exposed to it.

The interaction and content of the app must reflect the standing of the brand, so there is no point just 'testing'. You need to launch with real benefits and super-slick interfaces. Brands can have multiple apps (Nike has 12 live on the AppStore) doing different jobs.

Agencies should consider apps as a new marketing channel in its own right. Think like Google and evolve your client app, just as Google evolves all its products with upgrades and new versions that have enhanced functionality and added benefit.

Of course, Round Apps easily integrate with a brand's other marketing campaigns. Take our recent Santander app that links directly with Santander's TVC and brand launch.

Finally, you now have the most precious R&D lab ever: your consumers if you enable them, will use your apps, rate what they like (and what they don't) and tell you where the improvements are needed. This type of crowdsourcing has already been used by Dell, it's ripe for other brand types.