

INFORMATION, INSIGHT AND ANALYSIS FOR THE BUSINESS OF INTERACTIVE GAMING

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DIFFERENTIATE OR DIE

With the space becoming increasingly crowded and competitive, **Sotiris Sklavounos** of Intralot looks at how can operators can avoid commoditisation and make their mobile product and offer stand out from the crowd.

The **Apple app** store launched on July 10, 2008 with a mere 553 apps in its inventory. Today, just seven years after the launch, the app store contains approximately 1.5 million apps, whereas the Google Play Store contains roughly 1.6 million apps. Any search for betting, gambling, casino or lottery apps in the app store will reveal (depending on the country) more than 100 apps for each category. Imagine the consumers' dilemma in this case. It's like entering a huge supermarket with over a million different soft-drink cans and trying to choose from more than 100 different cola products that all look identical. How can operators' apps and mobile sites stand out from the clutter and find their way to customers' mobile devices? The answer is simple: through differentiation.

Differentiation however is easy to cite but difficult to execute effectively. Mobile gaming tends to become a commodity in terms of offered content like promotions, bonuses and markets. The brand name of course is an important factor and affects customer decisions up to a certain degree, but it is not a panacea. Operators must also pursue effective differentiation on other levels.

For instance, user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) design are two of the most important areas that could help a mobile product stand out from the crowd. These are areas that define the usability, aesthetics and customer interaction. Mobile presents a fundamental shift in the way we conduct business and interact with our customers. Significant intellectual capital and investment efforts have focused on designing new patterns for the interaction between the users of mobile devices and the offered content.

While designing mobile offerings, operators should keep in mind that

customers, having been exposed to a series of very carefully executed UIs from other apps and mobile sites, are more selective and demanding. Instead of a flashy, Las Vegas-style heavy UI (that is also difficult to handle for the less powerful devices), using a flat, minimal and easy to navigate interface, will immediately attract attention. Integrating features and functionalities that are inherent to the mobile use into the mechanics of the product is also a must (for example lottery quick-pick numbers based on gestures, on attributes of the current location of the device etc.). In addition, making use of the technologies around mobile (like Bluetooth and proximity networking) in order to enhance gameplay (e.g. gathering together a group of friends to play a card game) is an addition that can create greater engagement with the product.

In their efforts to offer an experience that is different from the mass market, some operators (especially in the areas of betting) have created mobile products that mimic the UI of hugely successful messaging applications. This way they achieve not only differentiation but also broaden the attractiveness of their product to customer segments that have low-end smartphones or feel more comfortable with traditional SMS-like experiences.

Moreover, building an ecosystem around the mobile product through innovative applications could become another differentiation factor. Operators can enhance their mobile offerings with features that expand their functionality outside the boundaries of the mobile device *per se*. The first examples are already operational, implementing product features for wearable devices (primarily for the Apple Watch) that work in close cooperation with the main mobile product. The adoption of

virtual and augmented reality (by utilising tools like Oculus Rift, Google Cardboard or similar) provides also an opportunity for differentiation with the added value of creating an engaging, immersive experience for the users. Although it is debatable whether solutions like these really appeal to the majority of the operator's mobile customers, still they make headlines and help applications stand out.

Also, one should consider that one of the most difficult areas of differentiation (also one of the most important ones, if executed successfully) concerns the user playing paradigm. An operator that effectively manages to change the user journey in the mobile product, and create a new way of customer interaction that takes into account the peculiarities and restrictions of the mobile device, will be a definite winner. We have already seen such efforts in the betting arena, where operators have tried to tackle the creation of accumulators on the mobile from a different angle. Instead of trying to find events in order to create the accumulator, the new approach is to decide on the desired return of the accumulator and let the application propose the events.

To conclude, in order to escape the jungle of commoditisation, operators must also invest on other fronts such as the active promotion of their mobile offerings and cross-application loyalty programs, as well as in a never-ending effort to continuously refresh and update the mobile product.

Sotiris Sklavounos is the Senior Product Manager for Mobile Applications at INTRALOT. He is responsible for the native mobile apps strategy and product development. Prior to his current position, he held managerial positions in Vodafone in the area of applications, content and innovation.

