

# In the Palm of Their Hands

## Smart Phone Apps Bring the Mountain to the People.

• BY TROY HAWKS •

**N**erd is the new cool. It wasn't that long ago when anyone caught skiing or riding with a cell phone was scoffed at by their more idealistic counterparts. Knee-deep powder and business used to not mix so well, but now all of that has changed. With the advent of smart phone apps (application programs), the cell phone has become an ever-more important, powerful tool for finding the secret stash, or the best ticket price, or the freshest slope-side sushi.

According to a recent article in *Advertising Age*, smart phone apps have hit the mainstream. In the article, experts Abbey Klaassen and Beth Snyder Bulik report that there are now more than 25,000 apps available for the iPhone, and 800 million apps have been downloaded since the opening of Apple's App Store last year.

Across all industries, more and more companies are exploring how apps can benefit their brand. And the first rule of apps, according to the authors, is: "They must offer useful, helpful or entertaining value to customers and potential customers."

For California's Mountain High, the benefit to the brand was obvious, and this summer it became one of the first ski areas to jump aboard the app train. For the project, Mountain High enlisted NSAA Supplier company PowderNation, a software development firm based in Santa Barbara, Calif. Among the company's offerings is the PowderGuide, an interactive ski resort guide available on iPhones and BlackBerries.

"The application suits our demographic perfectly," says Marketing Director John McColly. "We have always liked being



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on the forefront of technology, and this keeps us top of mind with young users who live and die by their phones."

The PowderGuide app not only provides current mountain information such as snow conditions and trail openings or closures, but it also lists ticket prices and gives users the ability to purchase tickets right from their phone. Beyond that, the app utilizes the features and capabilities that make iPhones and BlackBerries revolutionary. Skiers and riders can access GPS-guided directions and utilize automatic dialing features, Google maps, web cams, videos and more.

"The PowderGuide is designed for skiers and riders to quickly and easily get all the information they could want about a ski resort, 24 hours a day, at the top of a run or at their desk," says PowderNation CEO Julien Bassan.

The PowderGuide delivers more than 16 different content channels to entertain and/or inform visitors. The guide opens a new channel as chosen by the user and prominently promotes the resort's services and features. Users can be notified directly of special lift ticket or lodging packages,

midweek specials and powder dumps.

The app can help skiers and riders plan their vacation with information on lodging, restaurants, local attractions, transportation, equipment rentals, shopping and a lot more. During the summer, the PowderGuide adapts to promote summer resort activities.

Despite the benefits of this technology, not all resorts may have the marketing and resources to develop smart phone apps at this time. Whether to app, or not app, likely requires taking an unscrupulous look at the cost versus benefit analysis.

“Costs vary depending on what attributes you include, so take the time to study your guests and see what features suit them best,” says McColly. “The cost can be significant at first, but when amortized over five years, we found it to be fairly reasonable.”

McColly adds that integrating an app complements Mountain High’s efforts to further expand its use of social media to get skiers

## Save Our Snow

Clif Bar developed a smart phone app as part of its Global Cooling campaign that lists snow and weather reports for more than 400 North American ski areas, and also posts information on what those resorts are doing to fight climate change.



## Smart Phone Facts

- As of April 2009, Nielsen estimates that there are 6.4 million active iPhone users in the US, up from 2.1 million a year prior. *Source: The Nielsen Company*
- The iPhone audience is age-diverse – a device this powerful isn’t just for kids. There are roughly as many iPhone users 55 and older as there are 13-24. *Source: The Nielsen Company*
- 40 percent of iPhone users have household incomes of \$100K or more. *Source: The Nielsen Company*
- Research In Motion, maker of the BlackBerry, recently celebrated its 10th anniversary by marking the sale of more than 50 million devices. *Source: Research in Motion*

and riders talking about the resort. Mountain High’s app includes features that are more geared toward younger users, such as videos, ride sharing boards, and links to skier and rider forums. Other resorts might prefer an app more geared toward making quick and easy reservations or lift ticket, lesson and rental purchases.

“Smart phones are rapidly becoming the primary method of personal communication, allowing users the traditional functions of a phone with the advanced features and convenience of a hand-sized computer,” says Bassan. “It’s become very clear that smart phones will become the dominant medium for mass media, communications and marketing. PowderNation leads the winter sports industry into this new era by seamlessly bringing the mountain and everything around it to your fingertips.” ■

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