

Integrated Marketing Communication Plan

Event Scheduling &

Reservation Management App

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MAPC 700 - Capstone

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December 16, 2021

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to create an integrated marketing plan for a new event planning and registration mobile app for private mid-sized higher education institutions. Mobile applications developed for wireless devices such as smartphones and tablets are another way of offering several functions that make the user's life easier. Today users download 27.6 billion apps from Google Play and the Apple app store accumulate 21.5 billion U.S. dollars in the third quarter of 2021. While social media platform apps try to engage users on the social side, the chances of messaging and communication apps are increasing more in business and professional contexts (Statista 2021, cited 12.11.2021). The goal is to identify the target audience and create a plan to effectively market a mobile application for event planning that will allow a more efficient way to plan university events that foster the mission of the university and maintain quality in the business process.

Executive Summary

Event planners in higher education institutions offer a centralized point for event logistics to the university community. They provide expertise and provide location spaces to achieve successful events held on campus. There are many ways to schedule and communicate event spaces, schedules, and details, but none does the job effectively as a mobile app. Event apps are customized programs that house information about events. Event planners commonly use them to manage events effectively and where attendees can easily access event details. Event apps are becoming more essential as users expect easy access to their event information on smartphones and tablets.

Every event has a schedule associated with the event and can either use information created directly from the app or integrate with existing calendar data. If event times or locations change, it is easy to update the information on the app. The mobile app also provides the ability to link to a map where event planners and attendees can highlight and see event rooms and amenities. Messaging keeps everyone up to date on changes to events and push notifications to provide alerts on upcoming events. Connecting with other event management tools such as Social Tables, or event space locations and catering applications, allows people to create and update events using the app itself in real-time instead of relying on forms sent to department planners to update event information (“The Ultimate University Event App Guide”, n.d.).

Segmenting specific audiences based on certain characteristics helps identify who is most likely to utilize the product and services. Custom apps can range from \$10,000 to \$50,000 because they are created from scratch to fit the organization’s needs (Metcalf, 2016). Spending time planning on how the app will look and behave is also important. Determining how many elements an app will have, how many screens will be used as users move from one screen to the next, and whether the app exists as a standalone or integrate with an existing campus application is also beneficial. Each method uses different customization and coding which affects the cost of developing the app. Other factors which will have a large influence on the event app’s price are marketing, member value, the development firm and location, and the mobile platform (Metcalf, 2016). Creating an event mobile app for a university event ensures that event planners and users are engaged and on the path to a successful event.

Goals and Objectives

Product strategy is extremely important in launching a new mobile application. The process that leads to a successful product will determine whether the app will be used and sustained for many years to come. It's not only about creating the app but understanding how people will use the app to create events, access information, as well as how to manage the events without compromising quality. Users are offered the ability to access business products directly from their mobile devices through the power of e-commerce and mobile applications. Since most users own a smartphone or tablet, organizations must take advantage of the branded space to share their mission, vision, and offerings with the target audience. The user experience should be consistent whether the institution receives the information using a desktop, tablet, or smartphone.

The main goal is to market the event mobile app to a specific target market, create purchase intentions, and incite brand awareness and recognition through user growth and engagement, by December 21, 2023. A great way to engage users while providing value, increasing brand awareness, as well as increasing its sales is by mobile app development that is specific to the university's business needs. Once the user installs the app on their device, they will encounter the brand many times, especially when there are built-in features that foster customer engagement consistently. According to Shiotso 2020, digital accessibility is also important. Users don't want to have to send emails or fill out forms to address support issues or initiate event requests. Users want the ability to easily contact a support resource using the app's chat feature or manage event reservations themselves. Notifications are also convenient which is a method that is more direct and less disruptive than a phone call when it is not required. Having an event app also grants the opportunity to deliver a more controlled and complete brand to the users. Mobile apps enable users to facilitate browsing without distractions since they are limited

to viewing one screen at a time. Lastly, the future is mobile. "A report from eMarketer indicated that, in 2019, 90% of the time people spent on the internet went towards apps, not websites" (Shiotsu, 2020). By investing in an event mobile app, the institution paves the way for a better brand experience and happier users.

Situation Analysis

From campus gatherings to guest lectures, university presidential dinners, to weddings, special events are a key part of campus life and the university's outreach to the broader community. Event planning app for universities provides schools with control over booking event spaces, ordering food, requesting AV assistance, or helping with setting up and cleaning up. Using technology solutions that integrate with other systems would greatly improve the event planning process for the university. Event management platforms would offer the university confirmation on room availability, and share the basic requester information with other departments without the need to manually enter the data on forms multiple times. An event planning app would allow dates to be posted across different platforms, and staff can also post other announcements, including how to get tickets, for certain events. Most event planning systems can also perform tasks, such as viewing and storing room diagrams, communicating with facilities for additional set up and takedown, requesting audio and visual equipment, and ordering catering for food and drinks. The ability for a requester to perform these tasks would allow staff to focus on the event since data among various departments are seamlessly integrated.

Currently, many mid-sized private universities still use forms that a person fills out and sends to an event administrator. The event administrator then uses a space and event scheduling

system to manage available building resources and to schedule spaces on campus to book special events. However, it does not share enterprise-wide data and as a result, employees who are event planners must manually enter data into each separate system from a form. This process is not only time-consuming but results in errors and does not provide the university a way to integrate the same information across different systems.

Event apps for Higher Ed institutions fall into a certain niche that is suited for certain users with specific requirements. Development of the app takes money, so identifying the strength, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) go a long way to ensuring that the mobile app being developed is sound.

Strengths

- Direct communication and engagement with staff (event planners/administrators) and attendees – the app on a user's home screen can help provide answers quickly
- Easy to navigate/access – clicking on the app is faster than clicking on a competitor's website even if its bookmarked
- Communication - easy to interact with users with being able to quickly attract attention and prompt actions through push notification
- Information can be shared with staff (event planners/administrators) among different departments (i.e. catering, media services, facilities, etc.)
- Provides real-time or near-real-time results through integrations

Weaknesses

- Cost – app development carries a price tag but can prove useful when it improves productivity
- Developing an app is not easy and requires support from all stakeholders

- The app will require regular updates from Apple (iOS) and Google (Android)
- Not the best for multitasking – mobile devices are less capable of handling multiple, simultaneous functions at the same time

Opportunities

- Creating an app staff (event planners/administrators) and attendees want to use and tying it to the brand
- Building relationships with departments for event planning

Threats

- Competitors are taking up higher portions of the market share
- Insufficient authentication and authorization controls

In today's world, mobility relates to accessibility. SWOT analysis is a powerful exercise for assessing the mobile app's success or failure before making commitments. The strengths and weaknesses require looking at certain areas internally, while opportunities and threats require looking externally, such as competitors, markets, and trends outside the institution.

Competitor Analysis

Competitor analysis for an event planning mobile solution is an effective way to understand the goals of competing companies, using their strengths and weaknesses. Many universities utilize event planning software to help manage the event planning and management process of their campus events by helping streamline designated spaces on campus that may be used for guest lecturers, banquets and leadership dinners, fundraisers, training, or other special occasions. No event planning app will benefit the university unless its features and functionality align with the tasks the departments and audience (users) need to accomplish. The key audience of an event planning technology solution is not only the department staff members who administer and manage the different areas of the system, but also the employees, management, executive leadership, and students. The technology should be user-friendly for the intended audience and flexible to meet the needs of the administrators. It should also have features that extend beyond event registration but require the ability to track rooms and allocate spaces, as well as equipment bookings and reserve facility services.

A cloud-based event planning solution, preferably with a native mobile app solution, is a must for universities today. University data is stored securely in the cloud so there is no need to install the software on devices and the application is mobile-friendly so the audience can use it on computers, tablets, or smartphones. Using these criteria, the following companies are used for comparison.

Coursedog “empowers academic administrators with integrated academic and event scheduling, demand analytics, curriculum, catalog, and form solutions through a single, bi-directional integration with a university’s SIS” (Coursedog, n.d.). Founded in 2018 by Justin

Wenig and Nich Diao, Coursedog became a market leader signing on 60 new university partners and continues to thrive today. Event scheduling features include a cloud web app for events, a master calendar, customizable workflows, and forms, public calendaring, the ability to have blackout dates, and a booking portal. While Coursedog has a great user interface, it does not have a mobile app available today and is new to the event scheduling space.

Accruent maximizes the performance of a built environment and streamlines day-to-day operations so the university can focus on driving the business forward. Founded in 1995, the company has been a market leader in the event planning space for many years. The company's list of products includes an enterprise-level scheduling solution that helps organizations manage rooms, resources, services, and people incorporates workflow, provides better visibility for space utilization, and provides an API for integration with other systems. It also launched in May 2021 an EMS mobile app called Direct Spaces for on-the-go space management (Accruent, n.d.).

Aventri leverages the most complete meetings and events platform that includes everything a university needs to promote, plan and analyze virtual, hybrid, and in-person events from start to finish. Founded in 1998, Aventri was founded as Global Executive Business Service and operated as a fee-for-service event managing company. Their product eliminates time-consuming tasks through a centralized event management system which includes high-level security protocols that help detect and block threats to their customer (Aventri, n.d.). The company launched a mobile event app that keeps virtual and online attendees connected.

Target Market

According to an article by Forbes, 80% of consumers are likely to purchase from a company offering a personalized experience (Solodev, n.d.). To personalize the customer experience and identify the target market, we need to understand which groups and job roles will be impacted by the business or organizational change. "Demographic segmentation involves dividing the market into groups that are identifiable in terms of physical and factual data" (Camilleri, 2017). To identify the target market for event and reservation management, we look at common needs, common interests, and similar demographic profiles.

Public universities typically operate under the supervision of state governments and are funded by tax dollars and subsidies from the state. ("Top Public Schools", n.d.) As a result, the Board of Governors has regulations requiring purchasing agreements or state contracts ("The 2021 Florida Statutes", n.d.) that go through various approval processes which take time. Private institutions, however, have no government oversight and can operate freely. "Florida's colleges remain the primary point of access to higher education in Florida, with 65 percent of the state's high school graduates pursuing postsecondary education beginning at a Florida college, and 82 percent of freshman and sophomore minority students in public higher education" ("The 2021 Florida Statutes", n.d.).

While most universities have different technology applications to manage events, they all have one thing in common: using forms as the initial process to gather event data for further processing. The main challenge for the institution today is the lack of integration with current applications or the lack of third-party integration that slows down internal processes and makes work stressful when near real-time information is not readily available. University personnel is

always looking for ways to centralize the event management process and guest engagement in one common channel: using the smartphone. A planning and reservation management app solution aimed at streamlining processes and enhancing the experiences of both the planners and attendees would solve this problem. However, the mobile app must integrate with the customer's core business systems, must be secure, and provide customers flexibility and control.

When identifying the target audience, we need to look at various identities. Customers have a different persona with different wants or needs. A competitive persona is looking for competitive advantages, while someone with a spontaneous persona is looking for a competitive edge looking and want something quickly. A person with a humanistic persona is people-centered and is slow to buy but seeks relationships. A methodical persona wants to know what the process is and how the product can solve their problem ("The 4 Personas to Optimize For", n.d.). Understanding the personas help define the target audience but should be relevant to the product or services that are being marketed (Camilleri, 2017). They exist as impacted users for product engagement, readiness support, go-live, and post-go-live activities as well as executive or senior stakeholders in private higher ed institutions in the State of Florida with a student population between 5,000 to 15,000 and a faculty/staff population between 1,100 to 1,700. Key psychographic segmentation is event administrators who like to be prepared for everything become nervous when things are uncertain and remove inefficiencies that delay confirmation of events and keep track of everything as well as the decision-makers who like to view all data before deciding and implementing solutions that make business sense for the university. The decision-makers consist of titles such as the VP or Director of Development and University Relations, the VP or Director of IT, the VP or Director of Facilities Management, the VP or Director of Facilities Rental, or the VP or Director of Catering. Utilizing segmentation

recognizes the customers' needs and markets directly to the target audience without wasted messaging. Every decision is judged on whether the result is what the target audience wants or whether it is something that they need.

Positioning

Brand positioning is the value that the brand adds to the area of focus (Snow, n.d.). It impacts all aspects of the branding and how it influences everything the brand represents to the target market. It's meant as an internal tool to align brand marketing efforts with its value proposition (Hart, 2021). According to Camilleri (2017), "the mobile is an effective channel to reach out to many users." Mobile devices increase productivity and help with inefficiencies of the organization. It's a niche for professional growth as more applications are being created using mobile operating systems. Mobile apps help users accomplish tasks and provide convenience due to push notifications and personalization, thus, attracting more engagement. However, mobile apps shouldn't exist in a silo. It must integrate with customers' core business systems and must be secure (Endean, 2014).

For mid-sized private universities in Central Florida, a personalized event planning and reservation management mobile app will help streamline and boost the organization's productivity through a system integration with current business systems. Data that is fetching and processing are easier and smoother when a business system is integrated. Integration between different systems involves compiling data from multiple resources and storing it at a single location. Its major benefits are near real-time availability and accessibility of the data. Automatic synchronization of data leads to higher accuracy and data that is accessible leads to

improvements in team coordination of the event. A mobile app that is integrated with the core business systems eliminates the need for repetitive manual data entry (Reeves, 2021). Since application updates occur in a central system location, event planners and event sponsors can focus on their tasks without worrying whether sub-systems such as space reservation management systems, media services, facilities management, or catering systems, are in sync.

Cost efficiency is a major benefit especially for stakeholders who needs to save costs but does not want to sacrifice the quality of service or security. Central storage eliminates the need to store the same data at multiple places. With an integrated system, not only is relevant data available to the event planner, but it is also available to the event sponsor and attendees. Having separate storage on various platforms requires an exorbitant amount of system resources, however, when a system is integrated, the need to increase resource capacity decreases. Lastly, with a centralized integrated system, a single security platform with a robust security tool would be much easier to manage than having several subsystems employing different levels of security (Reeves, 2021). There are many tasks that an event planner manages to prepare for an event. Outdated and inaccessible data for event reservations shouldn't be one of them.

Strategy and Tactics

There's much to be said in creating a great event app. It provides the team with a sense of empowerment and produces great value to the institution. The app must offer everything that a web does so that staff (event planners/administrators) are incentivized to download and use the app when creating and scheduling campus events. A good mobile strategy requires many moving parts, each section performed with considerable thought, getting alignment across different departments in the organization and among stakeholders. It includes resources, budget allocation, communication methods, methodologies, and contingency plans.

The mobile strategy focuses on how the mobile app will help solve a pain point for the user as well as how to market the app (YML, 2020). Examples are the use of LinkedIn ads and trade magazines to promote the app. "94% of B2B marketers use LinkedIn as a content distribution channel, compared to just 89% on Twitter and 77% on Facebook and YouTube" (Forsey, 2021). A LinkedIn Ad is a paid marketing tool for B2B companies to create leads, share content, and build online recognition, and is a strategy for building an online presence in the B2B markets (Edgaio Digital, 2020). LinkedIn has a wide reach and the audience expects business-related content so it is an ideal platform to use to market the app. When using Sponsored Content, also known as native ads, it will show up in audiences' LinkedIn feeds, whether the user is using a desktop or scrolling on their mobile device. LinkedIn uses object-based advertising so there are three main objectives available. Out of the three, the objective that best meets the mobile strategy would be the awareness ads on LinkedIn. It gets the brand in front of the audience which gets people talking about the event mobile app product and services. "Through these impression-based campaigns, you can also gain more followers, increase views, and spark greater engagement" (Golob, 2021).

There are also many ad formats in LinkedIn to choose from but for promoting the events scheduling and reservation management app, using video ads in LinkedIn is a great way to reveal the product, promote thought leadership, provide an insider view of the company, and is an opportunity to show, not tell, the brand's story. Designing the video for sound-off viewing, adding subtitles, and creating a video for under 30 seconds will keep the audience engaged since viewers tend to drop off after 10 seconds (Golob, 2021). Trade magazines are also helpful since the advertisement is focused on a specific industry to market the product and services and content is tailored to the interests of its members. Examples are Higher Education Digest or Inside Higher Ed. A full-page color ad (6"x11.5") in the Inside Higher Ed is \$978. It's expected to reach 18,000+ opt-in subscribers.

Evaluation of Effectiveness

Integrated marketing requires that you measure the performance of each channel used toward the end goals. LinkedIn's Campaign Manager is an advertising platform that reports on metrics for various campaigns. To assess the campaign, tactics will be measured for their effectiveness to ensure that communications and marketing objectives have been met.

To build brand awareness using LinkedIn ads, certain metrics require focus. They are the number of times the link is clicked on the ad (clicks), the number of times people saw the ad (impressions), the number of clicks divided by impressions (also known as the Click-through-Rate or CTR), and average engagement ("Analyze your performance", n.d.). For intense campaigns when initially promoting the app. looking at the measurements on an hourly basis would be useful, as there should be a correlation between linked tactics and activity on the ad. Looking at unplanned messages is also beneficial. They reiterate key messages regarding the

brand and product but were not placed specifically on the ad campaign. “Strong integration results in familiarity across channels. Familiarity leads to adoption, and unplanned messages are a sign that you’re succeeding” (Harris, 2016). Keyword or phrase performance is also important to use for measurement. Ads should be performing well and steadily improving through the use of optimized keywords or phrases. For video ad campaigns, the use of a third-party tracking platform to measure and verify LinkedIn ad performance is valuable. LinkedIn supports Moat and Google Marketing Platform for sponsored content through the use of tracking tags. Metrics used for video campaigns focus on the total number of impressions analyzed filtered by IVT and the percentage of valid impressions that were viewable under the MRC standard (“Third-Party Tracking”, n.d.).

Conclusion

The purpose of this integrated marketing communication plan is to increase awareness of the event scheduling and reservation management mobile app and create purchase intentions. To help facilitate brand awareness, target audiences were identified and tactics were introduced to market the product.

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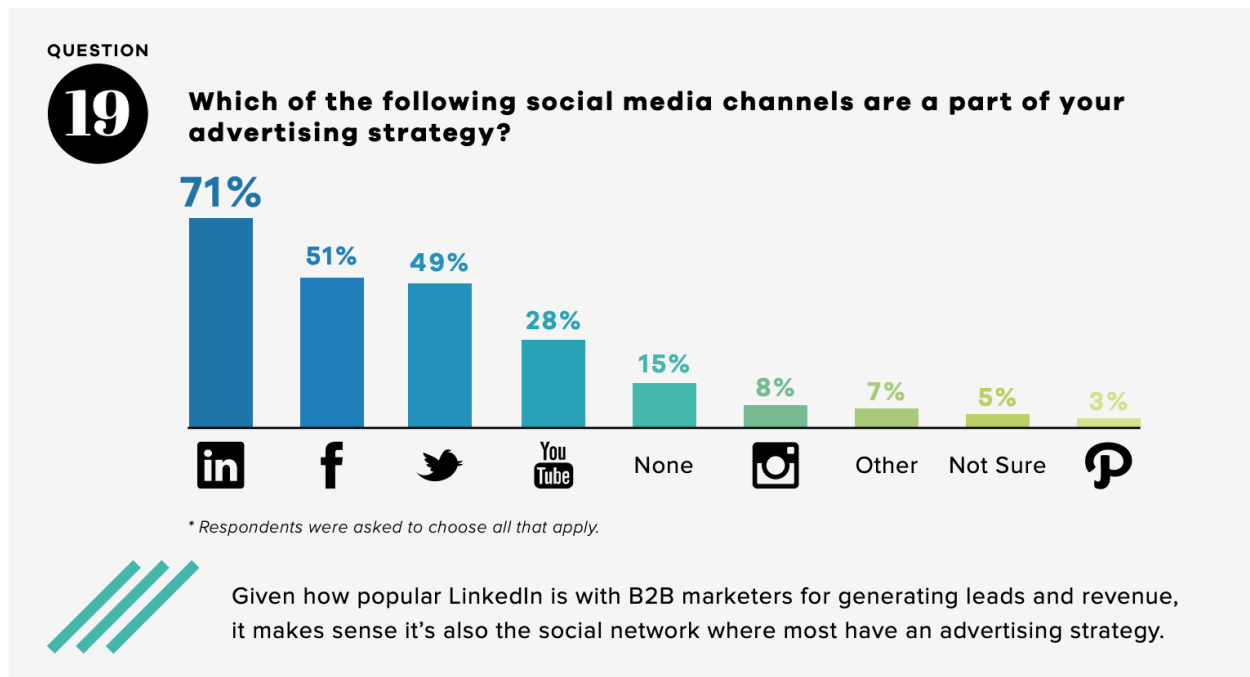
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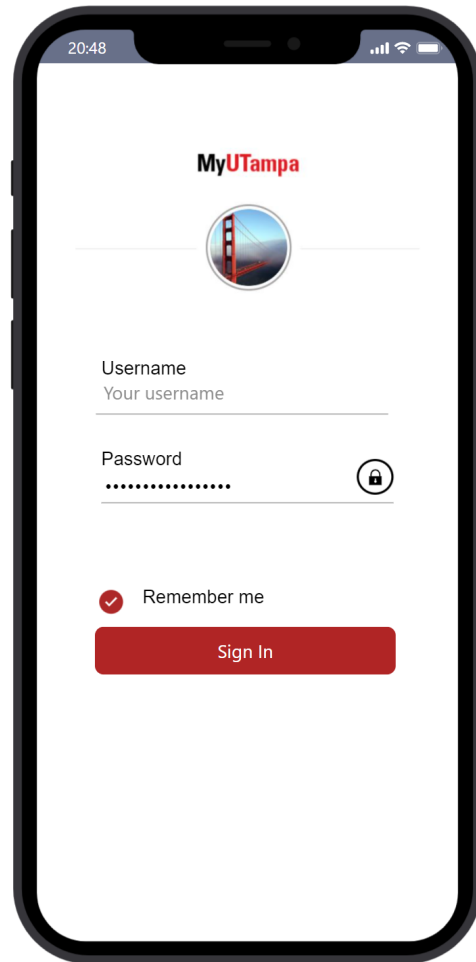
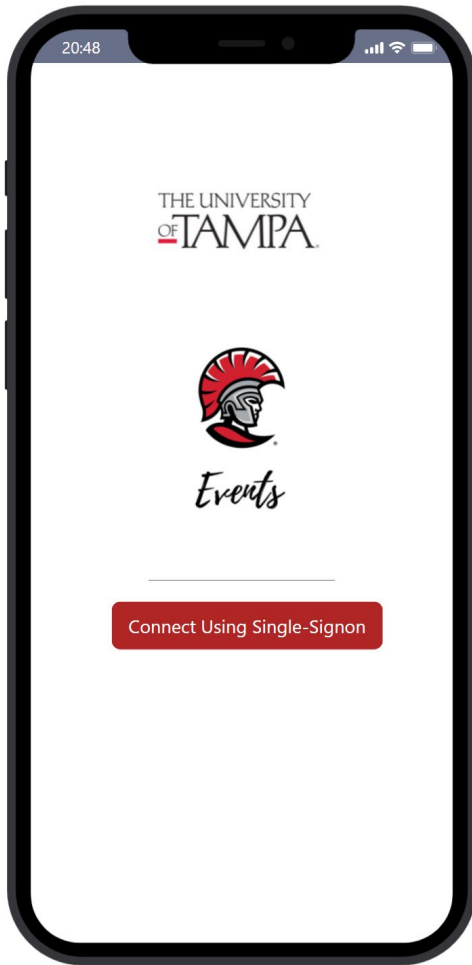
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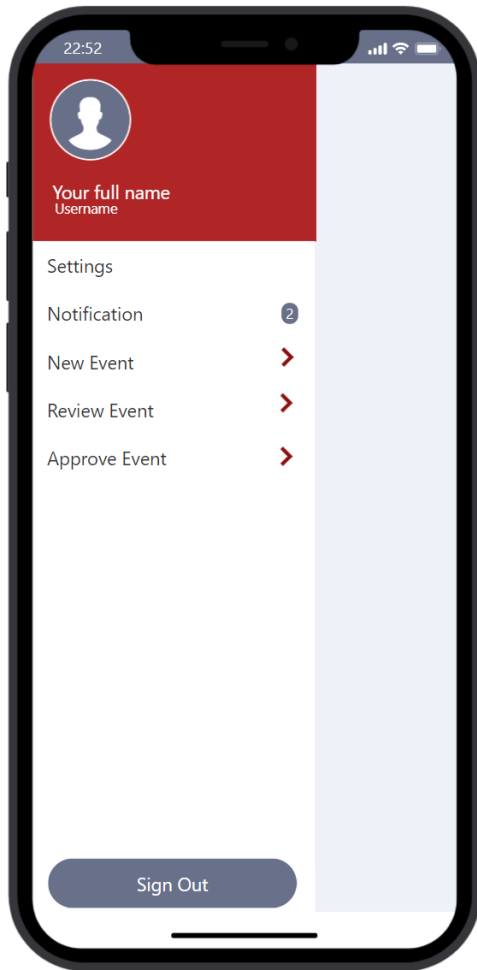
Appendix A – LinkedIn popularity for product marketing (Forsey, 2021)



Appendix B – Sample Prototype: Login Screen



Appendix C – Sample Prototype: Homepage



Appendix D – Sample Prototype: New Event

A mobile app prototype for a 'NEW EVENT' form. The screen has a red header bar with a back arrow and the title 'NEW EVENT'. The status bar at the top shows the time 20:48, signal strength, Wi-Fi, and battery. The form contains several sections, each with a title, a subtitle, a description, and an icon. The sections are: 'Event Name' (with date 'OCT 23' and time 'Saturday, October 23 at 2 PM'), 'Audience' (with icon of a person and plus), 'Program' (with star icon), 'Event Budget' (with pencil icon), 'Expected No. of Attendees' (with person icon), 'Location' (with building icon), and 'Details' (with speech bubble icon). At the bottom, there is a 'Done' button and a speech bubble icon.

20:48

< NEW EVENT

OCT 23 Event Name
Subtitle

Saturday, October 23 at 2 PM

Audience
[displays selected audience]

Program
[displays selected program]

Event Budget
[displays event code]

Expected No. of Attendees
[displays number entered for attendees]

Location
[displays location selected]

Details
[displays event details]

Done

Appendix E – Sample Prototype: Help/Chatbot

