

Riding the Mobile Wave:

How the ESRB's Voyage into the World of Apps is Paying Dividends



applications for both the iPhone and Android, with another round of development currently underway on a Windows Phone 7 app. The purpose of this whitepaper is to give readers an inside look at the development process for native apps and why it's important to the ESRB to reach consumers via native apps no matter what device they use.

“Working with PointAbout and its team of mobile developers provided access to expertise that we don't have internally.”

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is a non-profit regulatory agency that assigns the age and content ratings for thousands of video and computer games every year.

PointAbout has worked with the ESRB to develop native ap-

The ESRB rating system consists of two parts: age ratings, which appear on the front of a game's package, indicate a game's age-appropriateness, and content descriptors, found on the back, identify content in a game that either triggered the rating or may just be of interest or concern to a consumer.

In 2008, the ESRB began offering a supplemental source of information called “rating summaries,” which provide a brief but detailed description of exactly the types of content parents would want to know about when choosing a game for their child, including specific examples.

In order to make these rating summaries available at the store – where the purchase decision is often made – ESRB created a mobile website that included a searchable database of ESRB's entire library of rated games, including rating summaries for those titles that had them. The site served the needs of parents, who are the primary purchasers of video and computer games.

Testing the Native App Waters

The ESRB decided to take its mobile initiatives a step further in the fall of 2009. Randy Walker, the ESRB's Vice President of Marketing, discovered the PointAbout team when he was looking



Contact PointAbout at 202.391.0347, info@pointabout.com or visit www.pointabout.com for more information.



for a way to augment the ESRB's mobile website with a native iPhone app. The iPhone had made significant inroads with consumers since its 2007 release, and the ESRB wanted to capitalize on the speed and performance offered by native iPhone apps.

The ESRB's original iPhone app aimed to give parents an even quicker, easier-to-use resource than the mobile website. PointAbout and the ESRB collaborated to develop an app that would allow consumers to find out on the fly whether a video game would be appropriate for their children. The original iPhone app featured a search tool and access to the ESRB's expansive library of game ratings.

The app gathered content by making web service calls to the ESRB's server to download the

rating information for specific games and keywords. The app also provided the ability for the user to filter their queries such

“Create a customer-focused offering that provides value, engage talented people to develop it and be prepared to execute marketing and communication plans to drive awareness, downloads and use while measuring against goals to determine success or challenge.”

that the ESRB database only returns results within a platform or age appropriate ranking. The user is offered maximum customizability in the execution of their searches

Version 1 of the ESRB search app received favorable reviews from

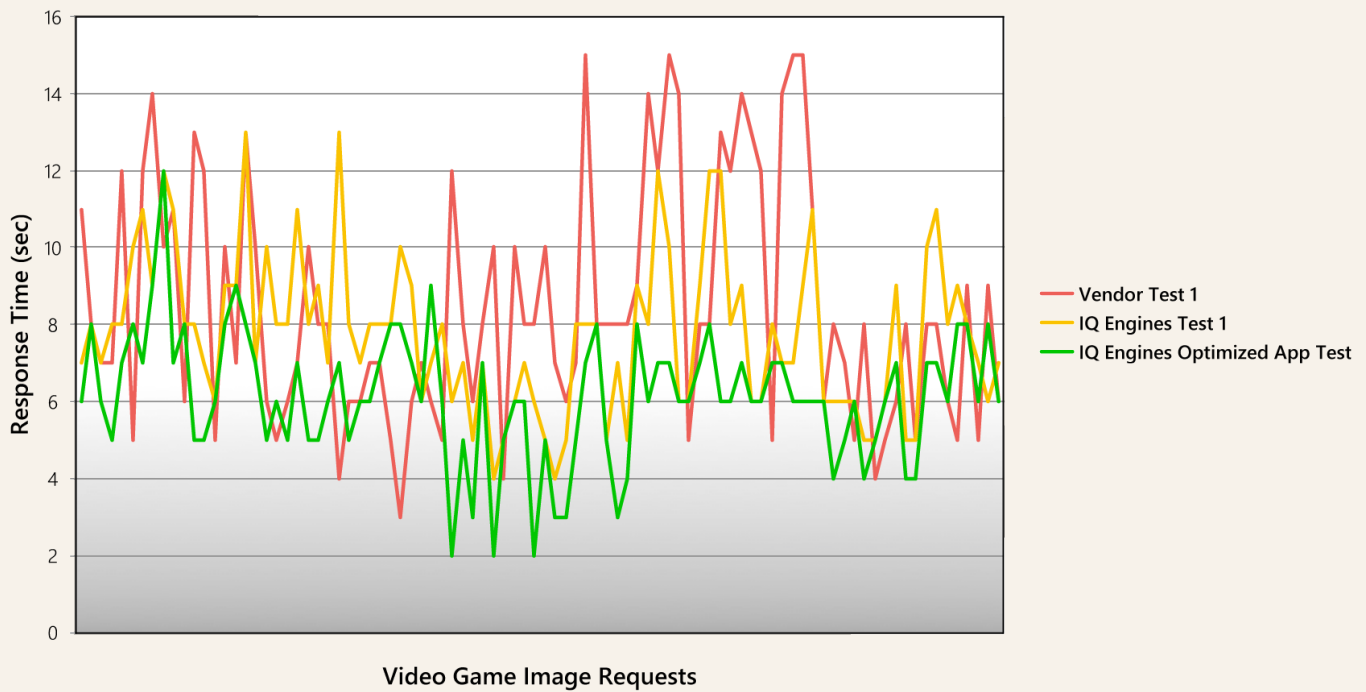
CNET and a number of other media outlets. The ESRB team found the app's user retention to be high, and the number of rating searches conducted via the app indicated that providing consumers with useful information when they were at the point-of-purchase was a valuable tool. “We measure consumer engagement with the ratings through various metrics, two of which are rating searches and rating summary views,” said Eliot Mizrachi, the ESRB's Director of Communications. “Our mobile strategy supports both of these measures, which increased overall by 20 percent and 103 percent, respectively, in 2010.”

All Signs Point to Android

While the ESRB's iPhone app drove significant traffic to its ratings and rating summaries, Android use among the general public skyrocketed. The surge in popularity of a second mobile operating system prompted the ESRB to develop a native app for Android.

The agency also wanted to release an updated version of its iPhone app that would have the same functionality as its first-generation Android app.

The most notable feature of both the Android and updated iPhone app is the photo recogni-



tion functionality, which gives consumers the ability to take a picture of a game’s cover and immediately retrieve its ESRB rating information, including the rating summary.

“The app’s search function and ability to access an Android or iPhone’s camera roll makes it a snap to use,” said Kevin Lenane, PointAbout’s Director of Mobile Strategy. “You could find the same information by searching ESRB’s website, but the app enables easy access to rating summaries right in the stores, where parents often need this information most.”

The camera search feature makes use of the iOS and Android camera APIs. The user takes a picture,

which then gets sent via web service to ESRB. The web service call returns rating results using a proprietary image-matching service developed by IQ Engines that looks up the title on ESRB’s

“The app’s search function and ability to access an Android or iPhone’s camera roll makes it a snap to use. You could find the same information by searching ESRB’s website, but the app enables easy access to rating summaries right in the stores, where parents often need this information most.”

ratings database. The web service calls are highly refined and happen rapidly, allowing for a quick image send and search regardless of the grade of user connection on their device.

PointAbout’s QA team tested various versions of the app built with calls to different third-party vendors for image recognition in order to evaluate the best offering. Testers measured time-response and image-matching results based on different connection types such as WiFi and 3G.

PointAbout and the ESRB analyzed the test reports and found that the image recognition services from IQ Engines were markedly better than the

competition. "Not only did the test results show which service provider produced faster, more accurate results, it helped our developers improve the performance of the application by fine tuning the image sizes," said Perry Miranda, PointAbout's Director of QA.

Launching the Apps

What better time to launch a retail-related app than over the holidays? The first ESRB app was released in December 2009. The ESRB debuted its Android app and new iPhone app in December 2010, bolstered by another batch of favorable reviews.

"We launched those apps last year during the holiday shopping season," added Walker, "which provided an opportunity to generate 335 million impressions through earned and paid media supporting the apps and our message encouraging parents to check the ratings."

The apps doubled the number of downloads over the same period from the previous year, yielding a 150% increase in rating searches, according to Walker. "Both of these metrics indicate greater engagement with parents and consumers and supports our

forecast of doubling app downloads and mobile rating searches in 2011."

Based on the success of its original iPhone app, the ESRB didn't think twice before deciding to return to PointAbout for its second round of apps. "Working with PointAbout and its team of mobile developers provided access to expertise that we don't have internally," concluded Walker. "I am sure we would not have achieved the same level of success without their involvement."

For other companies considering mobile applications, Walker recommends keeping it simple. "Don't forget the basics," he said. "Create a customer-focused offering that provides value, engage talented people to develop it and be prepared to execute marketing and communication plans to drive awareness and downloads."



PointAbout™
MOBILIZE.

Contact PointAbout at 202.391.0347, info@pointabout.com or visit www.pointabout.com for more information.