

Putting the campus into their hands

The definitive guide to creating personalised mobile experiences for every user

Whether your university already has a mobile platform or is looking to develop a mobile strategy, your students, researchers, alumni and staff expect to access personalised services quickly and easily on their mobile devices.

In this guide, we look at the challenges this presents and offer some ideas on how second-generation mobile apps can transform campus services into personalised mobile experiences in a way that first-generation mobile apps never could.

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Challenges

Nowadays university departments are very aware of the efficiency and convenience of reaching out to students, academics, staff and alumni via their mobile devices. In many institutions, several apps have emerged to serve the needs of these different stakeholders. However, more than 30-years' experience of providing solutions to higher education has taught us that proliferation creates problems. Indeed, we often see apps that have great download rates, but for many reasons fail to maintain a high-level of engagement and their use tails off.

ON AVERAGE, WE SEE ABOUT ELEVEN MOBILE APPS PER UNIVERSITY. THIS CAUSES THREE BASIC PROBLEMS:

1. The first is the duplication of effort, resources and money that goes into creating and maintaining these apps. Where a number of departments develop or buy, and more importantly maintain, their own dedicated application they are also very often duplicating platforms, resources and investment.

2. Secondly, this approach directly leads to inconsistencies in the user experience of campus applications, in the way in which the university is portrayed and in the messages that are received by the users.

3. Finally, multiple applications, each with a different design but essentially the same purpose, causes user confusion, which helps to transform what should be a set of simple experiences into a high-friction activity.

This first-generation 'many-apps' approach to providing mobile services reflects the fact that there are many different groups of users in the university each with their own unique requirements. Students, faculty and staff members, alumni and visitors such as people attending an Open Day, all have specific needs, objectives and expectations from their mobile experience.

However, these users no longer want or expect the entire university website to be replicated on their mobile device. Indeed, when it comes to mobiles, users expect personalised access to relevant and timely data.

There is no device more personal than a smartphone. While PCs are often a communal resource and tablets are sometimes passed around, smartphones are very rarely shared. Smartphones are customised with backgrounds, colours and sounds and app downloads in a way that no other device is. Even the arrangement of app icons on the various screens reflect the user's involvement with their phone and how it interfaces them with their world. This very personal nature of the device extends to how users expect to have information provided on it: relevant to them, personal to them and only when they want or need it.

Each failure to communicate in this relevant, personal and timely way detracts from the experience, increases the chance of disengagement and creates an opportunity for a communication to be missed or misheard. The ability to refine communications for the relevant audience and to push them through the noise to the users' attention is an important aspect of creating a valuable mobile experience for users.

Even more valued is personalisation. There is simply not enough space on the phone for your university app to be everything to everyone. Attempting to do this creates clutter, confusion and a poor experience. Users want to see only what matters to them and to be able to access what they want when they need it. In other words the app has to be as personal as the phone itself.

Lastly there is the issue of timeliness. While users appreciate the speed with which they can use your app they value the experience of receiving information when they need it. A user who receives a push notification to inform them that a lecture has been rescheduled is more appreciative than a user who finds out the lecture has been cancelled when they arrive at a darkened lecture theatre.

The challenge is to consolidate the (too) many apps of

First and second-generation apps

the university, its vast array of resources and its noisy communications into a unique experience for each individual stakeholder. Nine out of ten apps in use in universities are still first-generation apps. These apps are often clean and elegant but they don't provide relevant information in a timely and personalised manner. The first-generation app designer asked users to decide at the home screen whether they wanted student, alumni, admissions, staff or open house information and then under that laid tiles over everything the user might possibly want.

The second generation of apps are designed on the understanding that where an app has to be everything to everyone, it usually ends up being used by nobody. Instead second-generation apps ensure that the user sees only the information that he or she really cares about. A prospective student will want an overview of the relevant courses and deadlines, while a student who will graduate in two weeks might want to hire a gown or reserve a parking space for the graduation ceremony. It could be important for a third user to know that she has several overdue library books to return while a student engagement manager could want to be notified that a student is at risk of not completing their course. In other words, second-generation apps ensure that the user sees what is relevant to who they are and what they are doing.

First-generation mobile apps attempt to achieve relevance by grouping users together in a very superficial manner - usually by faculty or department or some other group affiliation. While affiliation-based grouping and profiling was once leading-edge, it fails to meet the expectations of increasingly digital native university populations who expect relevant information to bubble up to the surface for them. Pushing personalised information to the user is vastly different from the first-generation app approach of limiting the choice of buttons that users can push in order to guide them to the information they want.

Second-generation apps use a wide range of factors such as user profile, location and role to ensure the timeliness, relevance and personalisation of the content that is displayed and the access the user has to campus applications. Where a first-generation app may include a tile over the phone's standard email app, second-generation mobile apps ensure that messages are pushed directly to only the relevant students, teachers and staff.

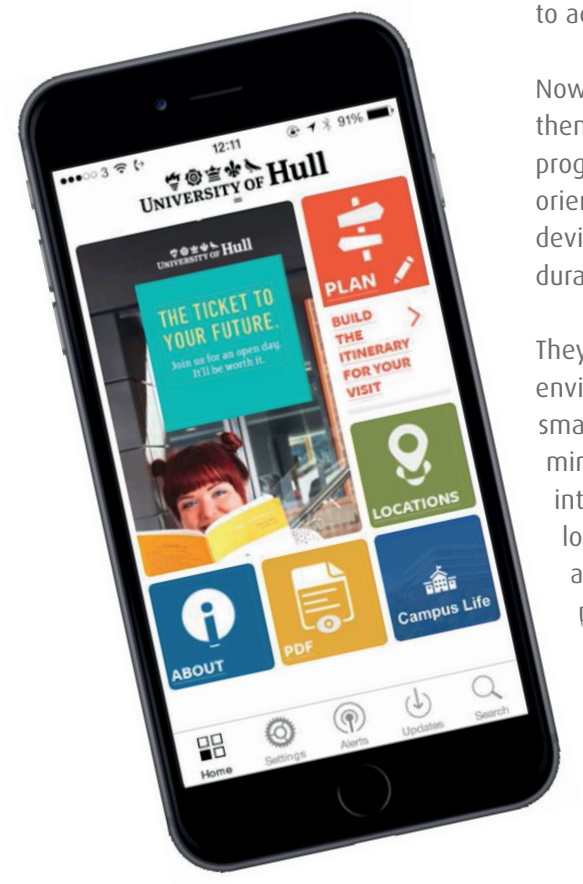


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Putting the campus in their hands

Ultimately, a university about is people and their teaching, learning and research success. How success is achieved depends on the institutional mission and goals, as well as on the aspirations of its people. To be successful some universities may need to increase enrolment, other universities may have plenty of applicants but a problem with success or retention. Second-generation mobile apps have a role to play in engaging both prospective students and the university population with the resources that can help them to succeed.

Let's illustrate this with a time-lapse view of an idealised student journey.



Prospective students have a goal: to select their future university. Marketing, business development and recruitment staff also have a goal: to persuade the student to select your university.

This initial mobile experience will condition how the prospective student views your institution. Google refers to the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT); the research that the student does before they contact you. Successfully guiding prospective students and their families and teachers through the ZMOT is what your website and online marketing is for. But once the student has decided to add you to their shortlist, their needs change.

Now they want to be focused on content that helps them to make their final choice and shows them the progress of their application. This shift from research orientation to task focus will take the applicant to the device that they use almost all day, every day for short duration, task-orientated activities: their mobile device.

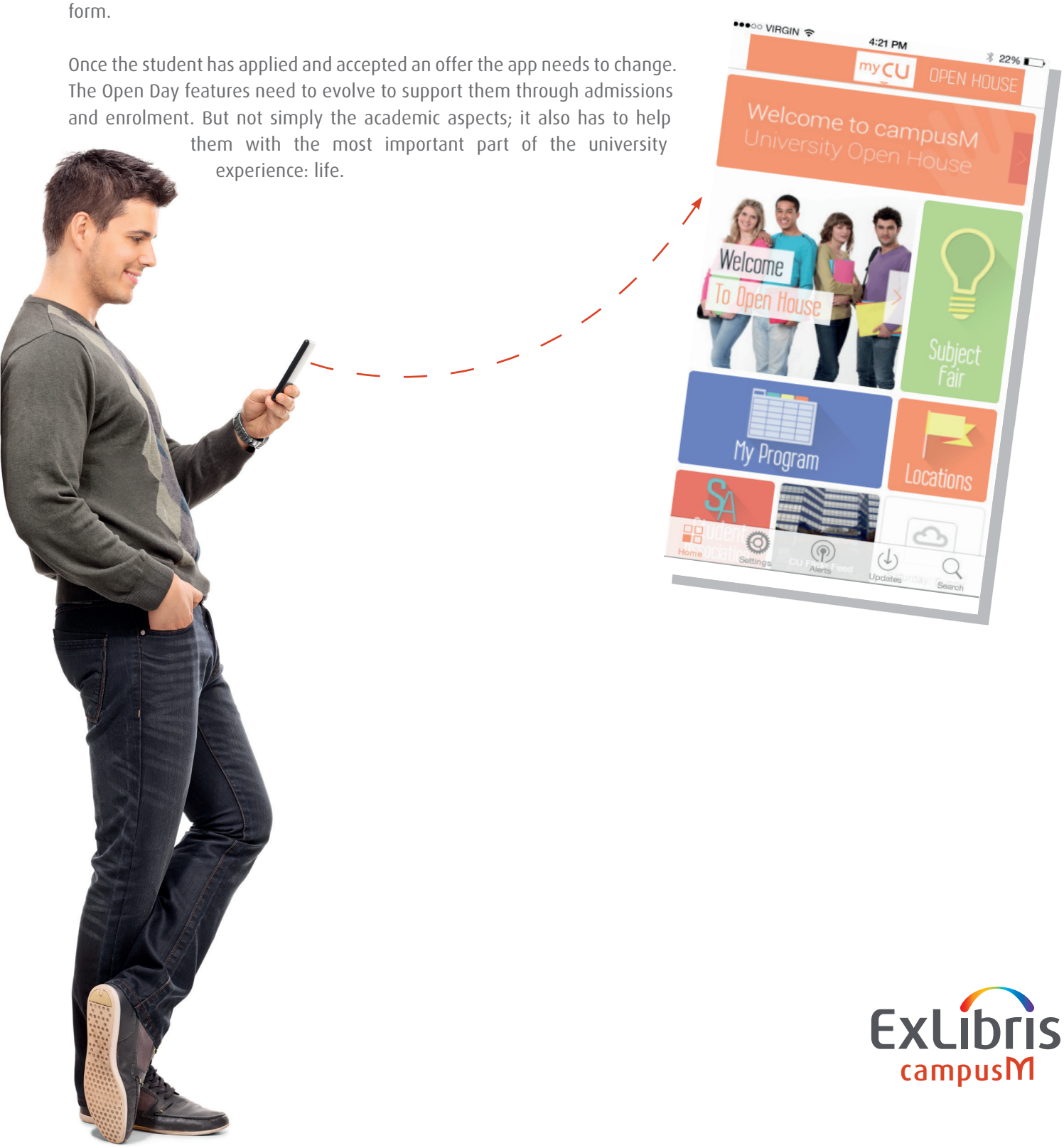
They are now engaging with you in a communications environment in which almost every app on their smartphone pushes notifications and badges every minute of the day. There is probably at this point little interest in seeing your LMS, library or student record login tiles, but there is a desire to be pushed reminders about upcoming deadlines, to quickly understand the progress of their application and the availability of financial aid, and to receive invitations to Open Days and interviews.

Open Day

Open Day arrives and the users have a different set of needs. They will be spending the whole day on the move and so the portability of the smartphone makes it the natural tool to help them along. First-generation apps email a set of directions; second-generation apps connect to traffic, rail and bus services. First-generation apps display a PDF map of the campus; second-generation apps use the phone's native map to create personalised navigation.

First-generation apps give users a list of meetings; second-generation apps exploit calendar entries linked to profiles of faculty interviewers, student hosts and possibly the other prospective students on their guided tour. First-generation apps leave the prospect to wander; second-generation apps guide them to see everything from accommodation to the library, from the canteen to the sports hall, from study areas to research labs according to the needs indicated on their application form.

Once the student has applied and accepted an offer the app needs to change. The Open Day features need to evolve to support them through admissions and enrolment. But not simply the academic aspects; it also has to help them with the most important part of the university experience: life.



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Signing up for the right courses

and selecting the correct modules are all important but it is well understood that a university can face problems retaining students who don't feel part of the academic family, or who don't meet the right like-minded people. A second-generation app ensures that on admissions day people have the opportunity to come together with new classmates, to find new societies and groups to join and to begin to generate the support network that will help them to thrive.

Knowing where they are in their academic life – their grades, adding or changing courses and the dates that assignments are due – helps students to succeed but they also need help with the routine aspects of living. Being able to deal with an accommodation problem quickly and easily gives a student more time to focus on learning; even a seemingly small thing such as knowing if a washing machine is free helps to reduce the friction that slows down the progress towards academic achievement. Secondgeneration apps can help students to navigate the campus when, for example, a tutorial is moved or rescheduled, even exploiting map and transport apps to get them there on time by suggesting, for example, a bus route.



While second-generation apps are supporting a student's life they can also contribute valuable data that shows if a student is achieving, cruising or struggling. Second generation apps can combine with iBeacons (small devices that create location awareness in the mobile device on a micro-local scale) to record in your attendance monitoring system that a lecture was attended, and to allow and record access to learning spaces, libraries and the resources used.

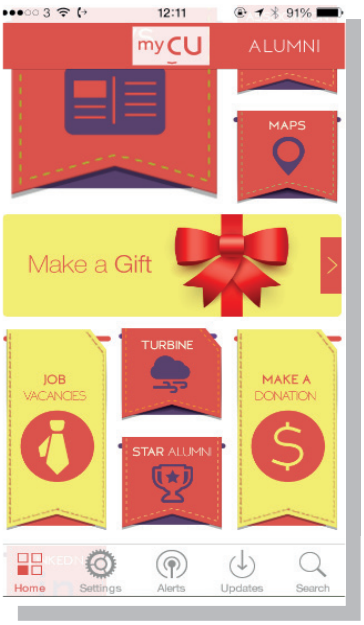


They can show where students are reading over and above the minimum required and contributing actively to the class. This combined with other data such as grade vectors, timeliness of assignments and the tutor's knowledge of the student can identify not just students at risk of non-completion, but also behavioural profiles that might indicate success. This allows the university to use the app to trigger certain interventions such as access to essay writing support or additional coaching in core subject knowledge.

Successful study and successful support leads of course to graduation and possibly even to post-graduate studies. Your current digital native undergraduates are tomorrows advanced students; all of whom will have different evolving needs. Second-generation app platforms support this change in the user's needs as their journey progresses to ultimately becoming an alumnus.

This is another change in the relationship with the university and although it is the same individual, the information they need in order support you with contributions, advocacy and student opportunities also changes. While their need to access their student record and their profile within the institutional CRM system evolves, the need to create relevant, timely and personalised engagement remains if you and they are to establish and build a fruitful longterm relationship.

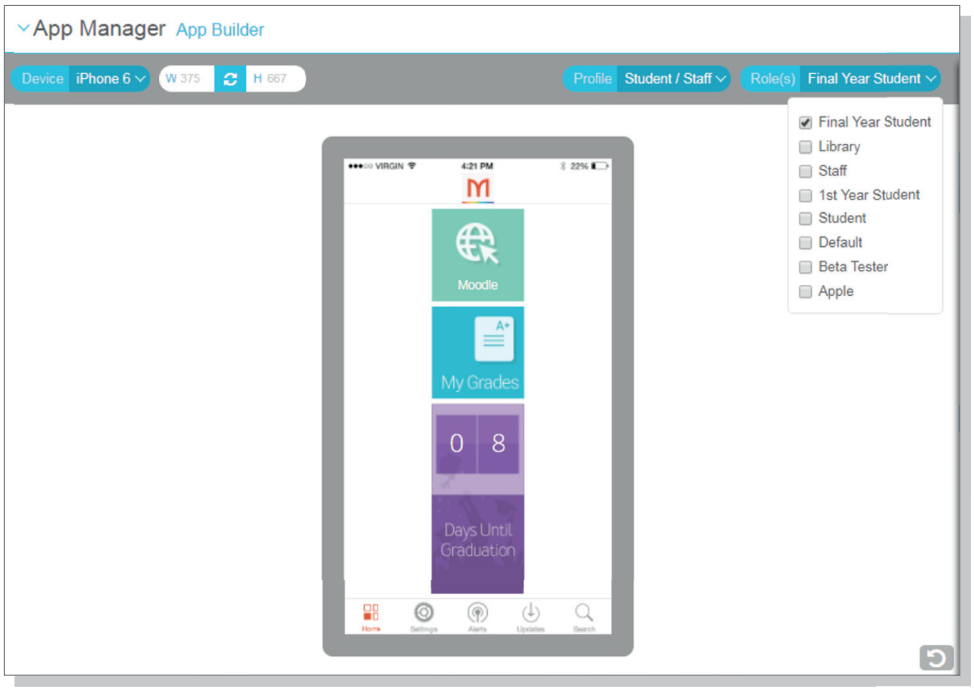
Of course, there are many more profiles and personas that will need to utilise the second-generation app. Academics, researchers, administrators and support staff will all have their own expectations and demands from the app. This audience diversity, combined with the sheer volume of information that universities generate each day, makes it essential that your app filters out what the user could consider irrelevant noise to leave only the content and information that they really care about.



Taking campus systems to the user

Second-generation apps utilise enrolment and push data as well as content which is based on user personas to reduce noise. To the user they are essentially a consolidation of content, data and applications. This needs a diverse community of content providers, from back-end campus applications to the people who need to communicate in a timely, relevant and personal way with both micro and macro audiences that could number from tens to tens of thousands. This makes second-generation apps ideal candidates for cloud-based deployment utilising a Software-as-a-Service model. Their openness allows them to combine data from different university systems, such as e-learning, library management, student records and course-scheduling systems with content publishing tools in a blend that satisfies the individual user's unique needs.

Easily build campusM with the App Manager



The campusM solution from Ex Libris is designed from the ground-up as a cloud-based app platform that provides fully integrated out-of-the-box functionality and the tools to tailor it to your unique institutional needs. With hundreds of second-generation apps in use across Europe, North America and Asia-Pacific, it has become recognised as the leading tool for transforming campus services into personalised mobile experiences.

To find out more call +44 (0) 207 255 0699 or send an email to infouk@exlibrisgroup.com

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