

Can a Smartphone App Help Your Business? 5 Questions to Ask

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Half of U.S. mobile subscribers now own smartphones, according to Nielsen, compared to 36% in 2011. Furthermore, given a choice between a smartphone and a conventional phone, more than two-thirds choose the smartphone.

If you've relegated your trusty flip-phone to the junk drawer, you're already wise to the true costs of smartphone ownership. The expense isn't the device as much as it is the data plan, which can set you back \$35 to \$90 a month depending on your carrier and how much data you expect to use.

It begs the question: can one free, well-conceived business app for truckers make a smartphone worth the added cost?

Our answer is [My DAT Trucker Services](#), introduced in May 2011. This is a free app for [iPhones](#) and [Android](#) devices that displays nearby loads that are posted to the DAT Extended Network — the same network our truck stop monitors use. Truckers can also use the app to find nearby truck stops, scales, truck washes, and fuel prices, plus other local points of interest. There are lots of apps for truckers out there and several for finding freight. If you're an owner-operator, or you manage drivers, here are four ways to evaluate which ones make the most sense to recommend:

1. Does it play to mobile's strengths?

Great apps use your phone's location information to make it easier to find important things around you. For a truck driver, that means truck stops, fuel, CAT scales, Walmarts, truck washes, and rest stops with maps and directions.

It also means loads. My DAT Trucker Services looks for loads posted to monitors at nearby truck stops. Tap the state where you want to go and the app will suggest up to 25 loads headed toward your destination. These are just a subset of all the loads that you can find on DAT Load Boards, including [TruckersEdge](#), displayed for your convenience. Instead of having to go into a truck stop to find a load monitor, you can use your phone to search a selection of local loads on the DAT Extended Network.

The results show the type of load, how long it's been on the board, the number of deadhead miles to the pickup point, and the name of the broker. If you think the load is right for you, you can phone the broker with a single tap of the screen.

2. Is it intuitive and simple to use?

Before you recommend an app to a driver, check it out yourself. Does it feel fluid and look like it belongs on the phone? Is information neatly labeled and well organized? Is the navigation quick and obvious? Do you have to log in and type a lot of information in order to use the app?

Here's a test: Count the number of touches it takes you to find what you need. My DAT Trucker Services delivers load results after two taps of the screen and shows nearby services after just one.

3. How much space does it take?

In September, the average iOS (iPhone Operating System) app size was 23 MB, while the average Android app was 6 MB. Storage capacity on smartphones and tablets can't keep pace. If your device has 8 or 16 GB of storage, you need to be aware of app size. My DAT Trucker Services' footprint is a streamlined 1.7 MB. It performs just fine on "entry-level" smartphones with slower processors and less memory.

4. Can an app improve day-to-day life on the road?

We've had more than 120,000 downloads of My DAT Trucker Services, but perhaps more importantly we have more than 80,000 active users. That's remarkable at a time when roughly one-quarter of all downloaded apps are used just once. It's a good indication that the app can help truck drivers save time, money, or both. As technology has evolved, drivers don't need to be in front of a screen at a truck stop in order to find a load. They can use their smartphone as their own personal load monitor—and spend more time resting or driving than waiting at the truck stop.

5. What do the other users say?

Last but not least: what do fellow users think of the app? Look for the ratings. MyDAT Trucker Services has consistently scored around 3.5 (out of a possible 4) since it was launched. Considering that 80,000 people are actively using the app, we think the high marks speak for themselves.

What do you think? Do you own a smartphone? Do you have a "go-to" app that makes the expense worth it? Do you use [My DAT Trucker Services](#)?

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Note: This article was adapted from DAT's [blog post](#) on www.DAT.com. It was first published in November 2012