The OALAIG Birthday Party App - A 21st Century Tool of Recovery

    The forward to the Second Edition of the Big Book of Alcoholic's Anonymous describes the rapid and surprising growth of the AA after the publication of the first edition. The message of recovery was spreading farther and faster than they had imagined. A 1939 newspaper article "…brought a rush of 800 frantic inquiries into the little New York Office…. New groups started up and it was found, to the astonishment of everyone, that A.A.'s message could be transmitted in the mail as well as by word of mouth." From the beginning, the 12-step message of recovery has benefited from using the technology of the times to reach those still searching for a solution.

    OA has found that it's message carries just as well via podcasts, email lists, online and phone meetings, as it does in written and printed form. And the 21st Century has brought a new set of tools which OA can use to find those compulsive overeaters who still suffer. One of the projects we undertook this year was to pilot test the use of a Mobile App for Los Angeles Intergroup's annual Birthday Party celebration. Here's the breakdown.
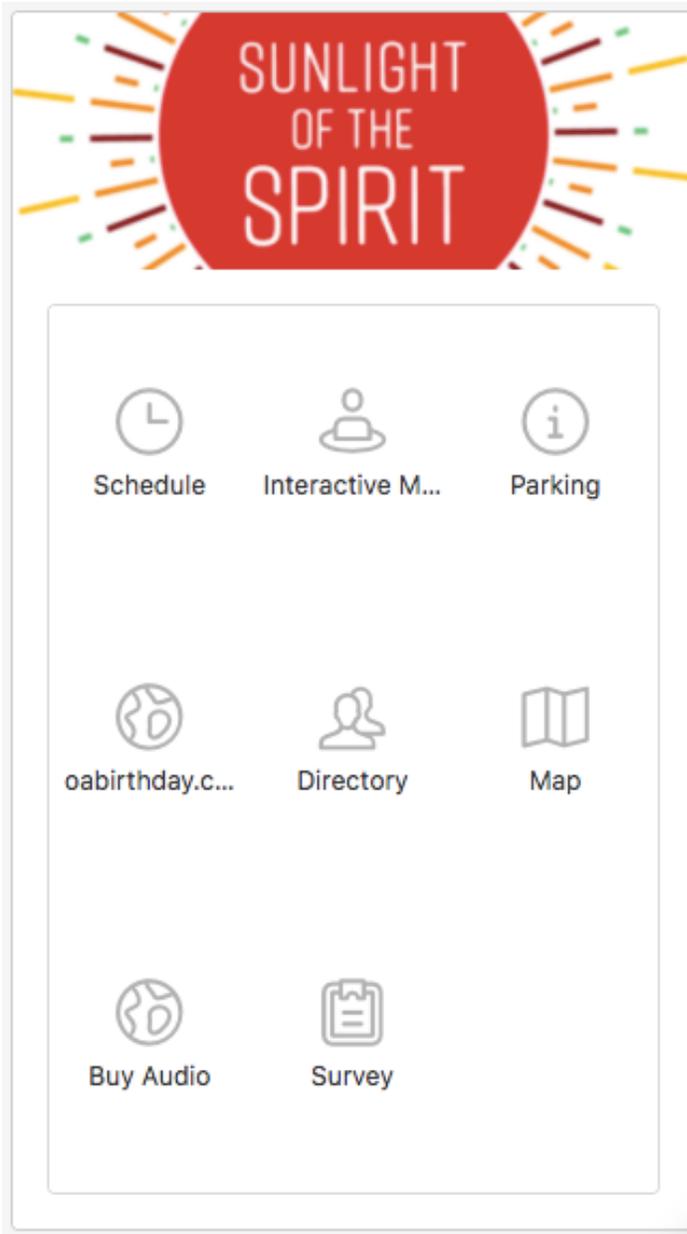
How We Made the App

In 2014 the LA Intergroup crowd-funded a mobile application for the 2015 Birthday Party. They raised $400 and had the app developed by a freelance iOS Developer found on elance.com (now upwork.com). It was low on features, visually unimpressive, and only worked on Apple mobile devices.

For the 2018 Birthday Party, we knew we would need an app with immediately usable features. It had to look great and it had to support more than one kind of mobile device.

After some investigation, we found attendify.com, a company which specializes in mobile applications for events. They offered a ready-made application which supported both iOS and Android phones. For a one-time payment of $799, the app would remain live for 1 year.

Attendance for the previous year's Birthday Party was around 750, and we were looking to get over 800 for the coming year. If everyone used the app the cost would be less than $1 per attendee, which sounded like a bargain.

The Birthday Party supplied the budget for the app and we kicked it off on June 5th, 2017.

Interactive Map

2nd Floor - Hilton LAX

NOTE: Lunch and Dinner are served downstairs in the International Ballroom

Opening Ceremonies Comedy Show and Closing Ceremonies are also downstairs in the International Ballroom.

Century C/D

Panels (B)

Century A/B

Spec. Focus

Los Angeles

Work shops

Marina Boutique

Carmel Panel (A)

La Jolla B

Big Book Workshop

La Jolla A

Marathons

Registration

Volunteer Desk / New-comers

Elevators

All-Star Tapes

Catalina A Sponsor Meet/Greet

Catalina B Hospitality

Catalina C History

Catalina D Meditation & Yoga

Newport A / Literature

The OA Mall

Newport B Souvenirs & Prize Drawing

Newport C Souvenirs & Prize Drawing

Rest rooms

Features We Used

The app offered several features, and we were only able to use a few of them. We included a complete schedule of events, which we could update continuously throughout the convention (making the changing of rooms and adding of new events MUCH easier than it would have been with printed materials).

The schedule also allowed users to build their own calendar of events by "favoriting" and making notes on events of interest.

We included a directory of planning committee members, with photos, so that people could find us around the convention easily.

We included links to the oabirthday.com website, including registration.

We used the "interactive map" feature. This feature allowed us to upload a map of the convention and tag each scheduled event. While browsing the schedule, a user could locate the room for their event by tapping on the location name. They would be taken to the interactive map, and their selected room would be highlighted and flash to help them find their way.

We also used the integrated Map feature to help travelers find their way to the hotel.

On the day of the opening ceremonies we added a custom notice about parking, which people told us was a bit tricky to find.

After the convention ended we created web links to the site where attendees could buy audio recordings of the workshops and panels.

And we posted a link to the follow-up evaluation survey to collect feedback about the event.

Push Notifications (the most Powerful Feature of the App)

Push Notifications are one of the most powerful 21st-Century Communication tools available. Unlike email, push notifications are immediate, short, and targeted. A push notification appears on the lock-screen of a phone, so it gets seen even if the person never opens the app. And

they can be disabled by the user at any time.

We made full use of the notification system before, during, and after the event. We sent notifications for the first event of each day, and roughly every 2-3 hours throughout the convention.

We were able to use the push notification system to notify people when we had to switch rooms for a workshop, when we added a Sponsor Meet'n'Greet session (due to popular demand), and to remind them lunch/dinner was being served.

Features We Didn't Use

We disabled all "social" features of the app. It was felt, early-on, that we needed to give a wide-berth to any potential anonymity concerns. By default, the app comes with the ability to create a profile, link to friends, and message within the application. Although we were concerned about anonymity at the outset, by the time of the convention some were asking us if we could turn on the instant-messaging or enable group chats or a message "board."

Looking ahead, it appears that people DID want to create profiles and communicate via the app, so long as those profiles and communications could only be seen by other convention attendees.

It should also be noted that turning on the "social" aspect of the application would enable collecting data on which workshops/panels had the most attendees — something we could not do without the profiles enabled.

How It Worked

We're still waiting on the feedback surveys to be returned, so we don't know if people "loved" the app. But we do know that people USED it.

Downloads: 545
     (iOS: 395, Android: 150)
Sessions: 10,347
     (number of times the app was opened across all users)
Most Popular Feature: Schedule
     (iOS Sessions: 1990, Android Sessions: 659)

Although we did not hit our target of over 800 downloads, the eventual cost of the app was $1.47 per attendee. The app is still running, and we can continue to send push notifications and interact with our attendees through the June 5th expiration date. Overall, the Birthday Party Committee was very happy with the app and felt it contributed greatly to the success of the weekend.