

editor's note



A FEW WEEKS AGO, MY DAUGHTER WAS HOSTING A SLEEPOVER AND AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, THE PARTY WAS LOUD. But unlike the parties I remembered from decades past, while the music was loud there didn't seem to be as much conversation as I would have expected.

Curious, I poked my head downstairs and was bemused by the site of three girls lying on the floor texting. The next day, after the other girls had departed, I asked my daughter about it. It turned out they were texting mutual friends—and each other! They were “talking,” just not out loud.

While that level of extreme online interaction is probably limited to teenagers, the use of cell phones and tablets as mobile hubs beyond mere voice is a phenomenon that stretches into every area, even conferences. Today, it's not unusual to see audience members using the social networking site Twitter to tweet the highlights of a presentation, tweet questions to the speaker, and tweet their comments about the subject in general. And it's become increasingly popular to offer conference-specific apps.

Given this growing activity, we're torn on whether to create apps for NASCC: The Steel Conference. Rather than simply dive in, though, we decided to quickly (and rather unscientifically) survey our attendees. We weren't looking for a definitive answer, but rather an indication of which way the wind was blowing. We sent out an email blast with a link to a survey to the prior year's attendees and within a couple of days had nearly 300 responses. I thought I'd share some of these results.

Not surprisingly, more than nine out of 10 respondents regularly used a cell phone. The most popular? Slightly more than a quarter of the respondents use some type of Blackberry, followed closely by iPhones and Android-based phones at 25% and 23% respectively. And given those numbers, as expected 77% had a data plan with their phone.

The biggest surprise to me was that our respondents were right in line with the general population's social network use. The best statistics I could find (and there are a lot of conflicting reports) show that around 47% of the general population visit social networking

sites regularly, which is almost exactly what our respondents reported. We found that 40% regularly use Facebook, but the numbers drop dramatically for other social networking tools. Next most popular was LinkedIn with 28%, Twitter with 8%, and steelTOOLS with 6%. (Interested in learning more about social networking? One resource is David Nour's blogs, which you can read at www.relationshipeconomics.net. Another place to get started is with AISC. You can join our Facebook page, follow us on Twitter, or visit www.steeltools.com.)

However, around 60% of the respondents would be interested in trying an app to help schedule what events to attend at the Steel Conference and nearly half would like one to help find exhibitors. Less than one-in-three, though, would use it to communicate with other attendees.

So will we develop a special app for this year's conference (May 11-14 in Pittsburgh—visit www.aisc.org/nascc for complete information and to register)? The jury's still out. The biggest obstacle is since our audience is so evenly split between the three major operating systems (Blackberry, Apple, Android) we'd need to develop three apps (though if our attendees are similar to those at other events it's the Apple and Android folks who are most likely to use such an app). The simplest solution would be web based, but as you might expect, cell service is not always reliable inside a convention center (though it's much better than it used to be).

So will we develop an NASCC app? Come to Pittsburgh and find out!

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