

Voyages-sncf.com – subsidiary of French rail giant SNCF – harnesses the power of the AdMob network to stimulate downloads of its iPhone app



At a Glance

Goals

- To deepen brand engagement among mobile internet users
- To trigger downloads of the Voyages-sncf.com app

Approach

- Used the AdMob network to serve platform-specific advertising on mobile websites and apps
- Employed innovative ad formats for maximum impact

Results

- Facilitated 17,000 downloads of the app
- Generated 21,014 clicks through click-to-site ads with a click-through rate of 1%
- Served 1.5 million impressions through rich media ads averaging a 2% click-through rate

Overview

Voyages-sncf.com was founded in 2000 to offer internet travel services to French rail passengers. Recognising that mobile technologies are ideally suited to travel customers on the move, Voyages-sncf.com launched its mobile website in 2007. Today passengers can book rail travel both through the mobile optimised website and through the Voyages-sncf.com mobile app.

“Mobile is really important in the relationship we have with customers,” affirms Claire Michel, who handles business development at Voyages-sncf.com. “Many of them have been using the internet so far, but since we launched the mobile service we now have two million unique visitors on mobile per month.”

Travelling light

With 51% of Voyages-sncf.com’s mobile internet users booking tickets for travel the day before and the day of departure, it’s clear that the immediacy of the customer need is matched by the immediacy of the mobile medium. The challenge of Voyages-sncf.com is to deliver the best possible user experience in this context.

Claire explains that this was the rationale behind developing an iPhone app; Voyages-sncf.com felt that an app allows greater control over the user experience and offers the best opportunities to refine functionalities for maximum ease of use. The business already offers apps for other platforms including iPad and Android, with a version for BlackBerry in development now.

The application transforms the user’s handset screen into a schedule listing train departures or arrivals with real-time traffic monitoring for more than 3,000 stations. The app lets users geolocate their position and nearest station, receive alerts about delays and book train tickets with Voyages-sncf.com.

Having invested in the development of the app, the task then fell to Voyages-sncf.com to promote it and encourage maximum numbers of downloads. “The goal was to see how we could improve our return on investment with a partner that could fine-tune our communication,” Claire reveals.

“Advertising through the AdMob network enabled us to maximise the return on our mobile investment. Thanks to ongoing optimisation during our 10-day campaign, the results we recorded were beyond expectations.”

—Claire Michel, Business Development Manager, Voyages-sncf.com

All aboard

Google with the AdMob network offered the opportunity for Voyages-sncf.com to use a variety of innovative ad formats to encourage brand engagement and drive downloads. Half of the budget went toward CPM advertising, which included an animated multi-panel banner, an expandable banner that allows user



Graphical Expandable Ad and landing page
 (ad text translated "Great Trivia Contest" "...100,000 songs to win!")

interaction within the ad itself, and an interstitial ad. The CPC component of the campaign, which absorbed the other half of the budget, comprised a classic banner format. A large proportion of the French public uses trains; the campaign required a broad reach, and AdMob's extensive network was able to provide this too.

AdMob's significant penetration on iPhone in France meant ads could be ran on sports, news and information channels. The banners enticed mobile users to enter a competition. By clicking the banners, users could enter an area of the mobile optimised website where they were able to enter their name and phone number to try to win a year's worth of free travel. From here they could also download the mobile application and automatically receive a free iTunes track. Finally, they could forward the competition to friends via Facebook.

On the right track

December is a busy month for travel, and ideally the 10-day campaign would capitalise on this trend. Claire set a goal for the Voyages-sncf.com app to achieve 15,000 downloads in the month of December. In fact, the app achieved 87,000 downloads in that period. Of these, 70,000 downloads were generated by customer newsletters and communications. Simultaneously, the AdMob banners delivered 50,789 clicks, generating 17,000 downloads which represents a conversion rate of 33.5%. Specifically, the click-to-site ad format generated 21,014 of the clicks with a click-through rate of 1%. Meanwhile, 1.5 million impressions were served through the three rich media ad formats averaging a click-through rate of 2%.

Optimisation during the course of the campaign was critical to this success. Says Claire, "With Google and the AdMob network we could interact more with the team, and we could also improve the campaign between the beginning and the end. Google with the AdMob network is maybe the only company to optimise the campaign while it is still running. With another company, we might start a campaign on a Monday and end on a Saturday. And we might do a few edits, but there's no interaction with the team."

Tracking performance to refine their efforts is a strategy that's worked well for Voyages-sncf.com to date. Moving forward, there are plans to improve app functionalities so that users can buy tickets for travel with even greater efficiency and ease. Marketing its services via mobile will continue to play a significant role too. "We are extending our budget more and more," says Claire. "It is assured that mobile is very, very important for us."

