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SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES   Technology Section

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APPS FOR ACTUARIES

by Kevin Pledge and Eddie Smith

The Technology Section is sponsoring a series of meeting sessions titled 'Apps for Actuaries'; the first of these took place at the Life and Annuity Symposium in New Orleans and is being repeated at the Health Meeting and Annual Meeting. The session in New Orleans was so well received that we thought that a series of articles covering apps would be interesting to our members. Each article will review three or four apps that typically run on smart phones such as the iPhone, Android phones, Blackberry, and Windows 7 Phone, as well as the iPad and Android tablets. We may also cover Chrome OS; more about this in future articles.

Surprisingly, a show of hands at the New Orleans meeting showed that only half the attendees at that session had a smart phone or tablet device. Maybe these articles will show you the value in these devices if you don't yet have one. Another reason to consider these devices is that all future meetings will have Wi-Fi in the meeting rooms and there will be meeting apps—appropriately enough the first app we review will be the SOA Meeting App.

SOA Meeting App (Kevin)

The specific meeting app we are reviewing is for the 2011 Health Meeting. Future large SOA meetings will have similar apps. I tried both the iPhone and iPad versions, and they both worked smoothly. There is also an Android version and a Blackberry version, however there is not yet a version for Windows Phone 7. The app allows you to browse the event program, build your personal schedule, take notes, access handouts, and rate sessions and speakers. The

Apps for Actuaries

transition from the event schedule, to the map or to session slides is seamless. You can also tweet from the application, including tweeting the presentation slides. No doubt, not everyone will be a fan of opening up the meeting to this technology, but I believe it is the way forward. If you'd like to see a video of its cool features, you can check it out at: Vimeo.com/21581588. Congratulations to Kerri Leo and the team at the SOA behind this.

Twitter Apps (Kevin)
I mentioned Twitter in relation to the meeting app; you should also consider a dedicated Twitter app. Before saying what apps I prefer I should say something about Twitter for those of you who have not tried it. You probably already know that Twitter is for sending short messages of 140 characters or less and are wondering what you would do with that. While some people may believe that the world wants to know what they had for lunch and how they feel after the gym, in business Twitter is great for sending links to articles and short comments, especially at meetings. Twitter is further enhanced by lists, this allows you to group people and topics. On the desktop I prefer TweetDeck, which is also available for Chrome, however the mobile version of this is not my first choice.

Eddie Smith prefers Tweetbot ($1.99 iPhone) because of the list functionality. I tend to use the native Twitter app (free iPhone, Android, Blackberry, Win7) for reading, but I prefer HootSuite (free iPhone, Android) for writing as it has the link abbreviations (necessary when you are limited to 140 characters). Seesmic (free iPhone, Android, Blackberry, Win7) is also worth a look, but it includes ads which I find distracting on a mobile device where the screen is already quite small.

GoodReader (Eddie)
Virtually all business professionals—actuaries included—need to look at .pdf files on the go. Most iPhone and iPad users agree that GoodReader is the best app for reading, annotating and managing PDF files when away from their desktop computer or laptop. GoodReader can connect to several different types of remote servers making it easy to retrieve and even sync files. In other words, suppose you mark up a .pdf on your iPad: Those changes will be available back on your desktop computer if you connect to a common server. GoodReader also works with Word files, image files, and many other formats making it the de facto file system of the iPhone and iPad.

iThoughtsHD (Eddie)
iThoughtsHD is a very well-designed mind mapping app. It's

available on both the iPhone and iPad. Mind maps can be very useful for brainstorming projects, managing projects and taking meeting notes. One of iThoughtsHD's most compelling features is its ability to connect to and sync with different types of remote servers. It also supports a variety of different mind map formats making it compatible with almost every desktop mind mapping application on the market today.

Please let us know if there are any apps you recommend or any apps that you feel we should be covering.

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