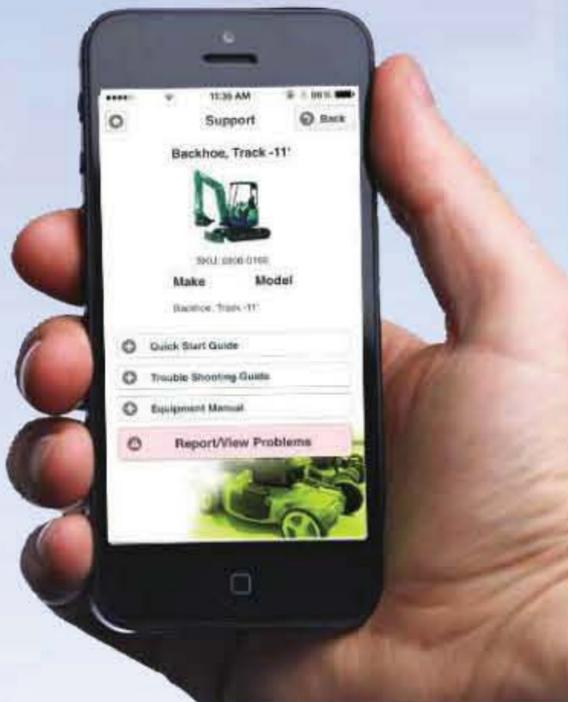


TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

*Northside Tool Rental
deploys branded
mobile app*

Extending customer support

By Wayne Walley



Northside Tool Rental (NTR), Atlanta, has launched a branded mobile app that delivers quick-start guides, equipment manuals and instructional videos to users in the field via smartphones. The company expects the app, developed by ReliRental Technology (RRT), Alpharetta, Ga., to reduce support costs up to 80 percent.

"If a customer is having an issue with equipment, we want to be there for them," says Jeff Lignugaris, president, Northside Tool Rental. "The app is a lot easier and faster for customers than trying to talk someone through a piece of equipment over the phone."

In addition to providing support, NTR's app allows customers to extend rentals, change return instructions and make reservation requests. Each customer gets his or her own personal account that tracks all open contracts, offers reminders of due dates and remembers favorite equipment.

"We designed the app to be an extension of the store experience," says Srinji Jamched, president, RRT. "By allowing each store to brand its version of the app, we can support the company's mission."

The app is available for Android phones from the Google Play Store and for iPhones from the Apple App Store. The app also can be "skinned" with a rental company's name and identity. It works through a desktop widget, which means the user does not need to log in or out and it automatically synchronizes with a rental store's point of sale and inventory management system. It is delivered on a pay-as-you-go subscription model and there is no hardware cost to the rental store as the service is based on using a cloud server that connects to the rental store's database.

"Our business is all about service. We believe this app is an important extension of that commitment and the whole industry needs to look at this," Lignugaris says.

"As early as two and a half years ago, we noticed we were getting more traffic on our website from mobile. I'm a tech buff and read tech blogs for fun, so I knew we were going to have some problems and needed to be prepared for the mobile tsunami," he says.

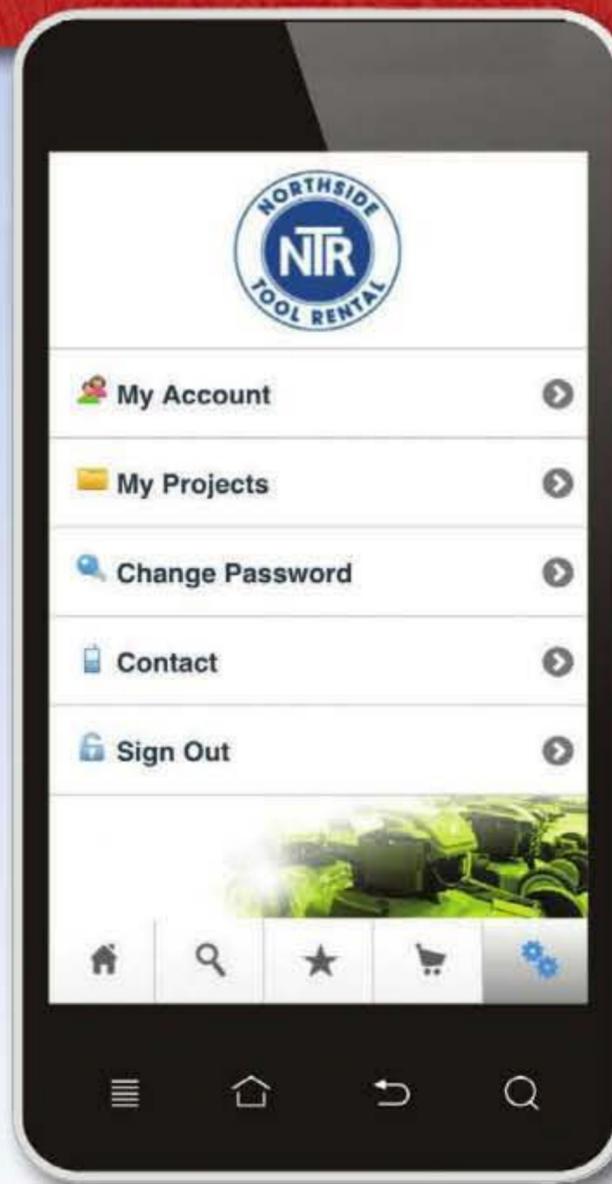
Lignugaris says apps, at that point in time, were too costly, but by chance he was introduced to Jamched, who was looking at building a mobile app for [Page 158](#)

APP From Page 156 a broad industry and had identified the equipment rental industry as a potential target.

"We began developing the ReliRental mobile app when we identified an underserved market in the mobile services space. End-users — both contractors and DIYers — rely on rental companies for more than equipment. They are often looking for ideas on how to accomplish their projects and assistance in proper use of the equipment they'll need. The rental industry is a very high touch, consultative business," Jamched says.

"In the case of contractors especially, their preferred equipment rental companies can virtually be an extension of their operations; making sure they have the equipment they need, where and when it's needed. Most attractive for us, these same customers always are outside their offices, in the field, and frequently on the move," he says.

Lignugaris says the app has several advantages over a mobile website. "Ultimately what we can do with this app is extend what's happening in the store out to the customer rather than having them call us or use a mobile website. The app is scanning our database and updating itself automatically. Our



investments are in relationships with our customers. We are not a commodity, so what we wanted in an app was to support

our relationship with the customer, not displace it," he says.

"If someone is renting something from us, they can go to the app, pull up the contract and drill into the support functions for the items on rent. If someone is having a problem, like they can't get a machine started, we encourage them to call us, but if it is after hours, sometimes people don't want to call. It's also a generational thing. Someone who is 45 is more likely to pick up a phone and call. If someone is 25, they expect to tap a button and get answers. That's why we're doing an app versus just a mobile website," he says.

Lignugaris says customers of Northside Tool Rental can open the app on their smartphone and automatically see what they have on rent and go right to the support documents. However, to offer support for the wide variety of inventory a rental store carries, the content can be massive, making it difficult for a rental store to do on its own.

"That's where RRT comes in. They have spent the time to create a database of manuals and spec sheets for various makes and models in our fleets. This shows the importance of having an app developer to serve the industry, not just an individual player. We ▶ Page 160

APP From Page 158 couldn't afford to get all this content together, but Srini can and then sell it to rental companies around the country to spread the cost of development," Lignugaris says.

He says customers who have used the NTR app say they like it, but for different reasons than the company initially thought.

"Because the app reads our database, users can get information beyond support. They can get an overdue notice from the app. If they want to extend a rental, they can make one click within the app and it is done. One customer said he's usually overwhelmed with emails, making it hard to keep track of what has been rented by his company, but with the app, he knows when guys rent things," Lignugaris says.

NTR's sales staff members also can access the app, but can see more things by logging into the system. "They can see contracts for customers and take something off rent if a customer calls. The salespeople can pull up the app and see pricing as well as inventory available as a network. The salesman can know which branch has the needed equipment," he says.

Following a soft launch, Northside Tool Rental now gives customers a

printed half-sheet flyer to explain how the app works that is stapled to rental tickets when customers leave the rental store.

"We are now aggressively collecting email addresses of customers, too. When we have the email, the app can see it when it scans the database, recognizes it as unique and sends a welcome email that thanks the customer for renting from us with a link to the app store so that they can download the free app," he says.

Among the app's benefits, according to ReliRental, is the ability to empower customers to extend rentals, enable field sales to check inventory and reserve equipment for customers, reduce late returns and enable reservations from smartphone and tablets.

"We conceived of the ReliRental app as an extension of the in-store experience, a way to connect rental companies more closely with their customers. This is actually the opposite of most mobile app trends, which are designed to reduce relationships to nothing more than efficient transactions. Our mandate is to enable greater collaboration between rental companies and their customers," he says.

"There are other apps, which are



intended to extend some POS functions — like inventory look-up and reservation booking — out to the field, but we see those services as complimentary. In fact, we already are in conversations to partner with POS vendors, which will extend the value of their products and simplify the adoption of ours," Jamched says. **RM**

