

- [home](#)
- [about](#)
- [contributors](#)
- [contact](#)

- [Login](#)

 [forgot password](#)

- [Search](#)

[K Street Cafe](#)

October 19th, 2010

[Think Tanks and iPhone Apps: Putting Ideas in the Palm of Your Hand](#)

Posted by: Rob Bluey

3

tweets

retweet

[Share](#)

Three of Washington's most tech-savvy think tanks unveiled iPhone apps in the past few weeks — a noteworthy development that caught the attention of Nancy Scola at [techPresident](#). Scola's review of the apps — from [The Heritage Foundation](#), [Cato Institute](#) and [Brookings Institution](#) — raised an important question: Does anyone actually use this stuff?

Early results for Heritage indicate the answer is yes. After only a week on iTunes, the Heritage app had 2,500 downloads as of Monday. Not bad considering we spent less than \$1,500 to build the app, a modest investment considering the potential upside of the product.

Scola's review is mostly upbeat and positive about each of the three apps, but she's also skeptical about their broader appeal. She concludes by asking this question: "Is anyone seeking out these apps as they seek out research, news and points of view?"

It's a hard question to answer after only one week on the market. It would be nice to have detailed demographic data on each of the 2,500 individuals who have downloaded our app to know if they're existing Heritage supporters, Capitol Hill staff or Tea Party activists who might be unfamiliar with our organization. Chances are that most have some connection to Heritage already and heard about the app from our e-mail or Twitter promotion.

Congressional staff, as Scola suspected, are a target audience we'd like to reach. Staff-issued BlackBerrys still dominate on Capitol Hill, and according to [National Journal](#), 93% have one. The iPhone comes in second at 14%, based on the 2009 survey. Even more stunning is that Capitol Hill staff average about two mobile devices, meaning some are carrying a BlackBerry and an iPhone. No one in Washington is more addicted to mobile.

According to the same National Journal survey, congressional staff say their mobile devices are essential for things other than e-mail. Approximately 60% use their smartphones each day to get the latest news and information.

Heritage set out to design an app that would address this trend of news consumption. We wanted to simplify the way users consume our latest content — in much the same way people read the latest news on the Huffington Post app or scan headlines on the New York Times app.

But we also wanted to make it different from Heritage.org, which already performs very well on the iPhone. While the website organizes information by topic and features a robust search, the app displays the content chronologically. Scola criticized the decision, but it was intentional.

National Journal's research indicates the focus of mobile usage is on recent and breaking stories. It made sense that Heritage app users would be looking for our perspective on the latest issues brewing on Capitol Hill. With so many congressional staffers addicted to their mobile devices, it should be a welcome addition.

My colleague, Tim McGovern, Heritage’s online communications director, spent mostly nights and weekends working on the iPhone app. He’s now keeping close tabs on the usage to help direct future development, including what additional features merit consideration and whether Heritage should build an app for other mobile devices such as BlackBerry or Android.

We’re an idea factory at Heritage. And with those ideas gaining popularity amongst a growing number of Americans, we want to make sure they’re able to consume our information with ease in the palm of their hand.

Rob Bluey directs the Center for Media and Public Policy at The Heritage Foundation.

Like

- [0 Comments](#)
- [tags](#)
 - [Brookings Institution](#)
 - [Cato Institute](#)
 - [iphone apps](#)
 - [The Heritage Foundation](#)
- [permalink](#)
- [share](#)
 -  [del.icio.us](#)
 -  [facebook](#)
 -  [technorati](#)
 -  [more »](#)
 -  [forward](#)

Comments

Name (required)

Mail (will not be published) (required)

Website

>>




[Recent posts](#)

- October 19th, 2010

>>

[nk Tanks and iPhone Apps: Putting Ideas in the Palm of Your Hand](#)

[No Comments](#)

- October 19th, 2010

[FTC Blogger Rules: Why Not Disclose Advertising?](#)

[No Comments](#)