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Pokémon GO App lures opportunity and concern to Valley businesses

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Business owners don't have to be Pokémon fans to capitalize on the increased foot traffic of the mobile game Pokémon GO.

Niantic Inc. created the augmented reality mobile game, allowing users to travel outside using GPS location on their phone to catch and battle the beloved creatures of the Pokémon franchise.

Currently, Pokémon GO ranks top among free games in Android and iOS app stores.

The appeal for businesses lie with "Pokéstops," where players can visit stationary locations in real places near popular city monuments and features to gain items for the game.

While the Pokéstops were chosen mostly for being landmarks, the app also included locations from over four years of community-submitted locations from Niantic's other augmented reality game, Ingress.

How the Pokéstop looks in the app.

For some lucky business owners, that means they are positioned next to or on top of a Pokéstop, where players will be frequenting.

So, despite Pokémon players catching fake creatures, the increased foot traffic to businesses around the Valley is real.

Critical Threat Comics and Games in Tempe have harnessed the app to increase their business through the app itself and social media marketing. The comic book and game store is located right

on top of a Pokéstop.

"We've seen double what we normally do in summer," said Erik Miller, one of the owners of Critical Threat. The business is slower then, due to Arizona State University students leaving for the summer break.

Miller said his business was able to quickly take advantage of the app's success by hosting a "Pokémon Hunt" that began at Critical Threat and ended by walking to Tempe Town Lake. The event, created by a growing "Arizona Pokemon Go Community" on Facebook of over 10,000, had 1,780 people labeled as "Went" and 3,940 individuals as "Interested".

Critical Threat's occupancy is 150 people and for a time Miller estimated they reached capacity and over 500 people in the parking lot for the event.

To complement the event, Miller said his store sold mobile chargers, food, drinks and hosted a Pokémon-themed sale.

"I bet about 70 percent of people who came in bought something," Miller said.

Miller said the business is already gearing up for August, when ASU students return for classes.

As for the game itself, Miller said the in-app purchase of "lure modules" allows a Pokéstop to attract more Pokémon than average, making it a desirable location for players to hang around.

One lure module costs 80 coins and 100 coins cost 99 cents, though players of the game can earn lures by leveling up in the game, making the feature free to use for avid players.

The comic book storeowner estimates he's only spent $20 over the past few days for lure modules, keeping a steady stream of Pokémon for customers to collect when they come in.

For a server at burger joint The Counter in downtown Phoenix, Ross Trammell said he has seen the potential for his employer to advertise to Pokémon GO players.

"We had a gentleman come in and sit at the bar earlier and just collect items while he was here," said Trammell.

While The Counter doesn't currently have any Pokémon GO promotions, Trammell said the extra foot traffic wouldn't hurt in the summer season.

For other businesses, the recent influx of visitors has been a concern.

Doug Lewallen, assistant director of security for Universal Protection in downtown Phoenix, said the city block he manages has seen nonstop traffic due to the app.

"They're not really inside the building, but they are sticking around outside longer," Lewallen said.

While the security director understands new visitors are bringing business with them, he said it is harder to keep the area safe.

"You see people trip because they are looking down at their phones," Lewallen said. He also explained that due to the increased traffic it is harder for him and his coworkers to determine a threat from a non-threat, with individuals glued to their phones and traveling in circles around the

block.

Wells Fargo security guard Rigo Delgado said that even though a Pokéstop is right next to his desk that no one has come inside to actually see the landmark itself.

For businesses that had no idea they were located near a Pokéstop, social media specialist Desiree Martinez said businesses should embrace the app.

"It's a simple, low-cost way to advertise your business," Martinez said. She said no one predicted the popularity of apps such as Snapchat and that businesses must also learn to acclimate to this new app.

"The reality is that you have to follow the money," said Scott Kelly, CEO of Black Dog Venture Partners.

Kelly recently bought "LurePokemon.com," a domain name for a marketing agency he intends to make that takes advantage of the viral gaming app.

While Kelly said it is currently impossible to remotely manage a lure module from a remote location, someone still has to understand and manage marketing campaigns.

"You just have to be creative, it's still just the beginning," Kelly said.

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