Eller Economy App Supports 'Informed Decision-Making' in Arizona

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Have you ever been in a meeting and needed timely and easily digestible data on unemployment rates, retail sales, building permits or personal income in Arizona and the United States?

The newly released Arizona's Economy [1] app provides that information and more, for free.

The mobile app was developed by the UA's Economic and Business Research Center [2], in collaboration with the University's Mobile Matters [3] team.

"Our mission is to support informed decision-making in Arizona," said Maile Nadelhoffer, a senior research economist and webmaster for EBR, housed in the Eller College of Management [4].

Drawing on a robust database of socioeconomic and demographic information for Arizona and the nation, the app is designed to provide policymakers, business owners, faculty, students, investors and members of the general public.

"I think about the political debate and how so many pieces of information are thrown out there. The fact-checking industry has become an industry unto itself," said Nadelhoffer, who started developing the idea for such an application three years ago.

But what about putting those fact-checking capabilities into the hands of everyday citizens? "It's a huge value for citizens, for a start," she said.

The app joins a suite of other mobile applications developed at the UA for the similar purpose of arming people with information and knowledge to improve, among other things, their safety, health and education. Other examples include: Dust Storm [5], an app that contains weather alerts and other information about dust storms; AnimalWatch [6], an educational app that helps children develop math skills; and Chemistry By Design [7], an interactive virtual tool that teaches users about synthetic sequences.

Programming and design work on the Arizona’s Economy app was led by UA Mobile Matters, a team that develops news mobile apps in collaboration with faculty, staff and students. The Eller team used new cutting-edge technology, dataZoa, developed by Leading Market Technologies of Boston. In recognition of Eller's contributions to the development and beta testing of this product, LMT gifted the UA with a software license grant valued at $600,000. This cloud-based software ensures that the Arizona’s Economy app is robust and updates regularly.

Powered by the dataZoa software and available for iPhone and Android users, the app is a
strong, portable complement to the EBR website, which also contains up-to-date data on the state's economic performance.

"There are some great reports out there. But you look at them and realize, 'Oh, this is from 2006 and was never updated,'" Nadelhoffer said. "That's what we're trying to avoid. And we want to do that by pushing the edge of technology."

Wayne Peterson, assistant director of Web and mobile services for University Information Technology Services, said the idea for Arizona's Economy was especially well-tuned for mobile devices.

"What makes this app unique is its ability to render current and historic economic indicators for the state of Arizona," said Peterson, also a member of the Mobile Matters team.

"It's a handy way to be able to look at a lot of data quickly," Peterson said.

Peterson also noted another important benefit of the app’s development — the involvement of UA students.

UA alumnus Ami Buczek and Daniel Kinnear, an EBR staff member pursuing a master's degree at Eller, contributed significantly to both the app's design and database development, providing invaluable input while also gaining important work-related knowledge and project management skills, Peterson said. Buczek, who developed the Android app, became involved with the project during her undergraduate years studying computer science and German studies.

"We could not have done all of this without the grant from LMT, Mobile Matters really stepping to the plate with terrific programming and implementation and our talented student workers," Nadelhoffer said. "It turned out to be a really great collaboration."

"The app is also a portal to bring people into the more detailed data they didn't know was accessible to them on the EBR website," Nadelhoffer said.

"It's important for people, whether they are having political and economic conversations or discussions about economic development, to be able to take these basic statistics and ground themselves in what they are saying."

Source URL: https://uaatwork.arizona.edu/lqp/eller-economy-app-supports-informed-decision-making-arizona

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[1] https://moblematters.secure.arizona.edu/arizonas-economy
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