



build an app, grow a business

BY LESLIE MERTZ

Most companies would be thrilled to add an app that would help them engage more efficiently and more favorably with their customers. Unfortunately, the majority of companies don't know how to build one. That's OK, according to Bill Camp, who works in development and planning at Detroit Labs. His business can do it for them.

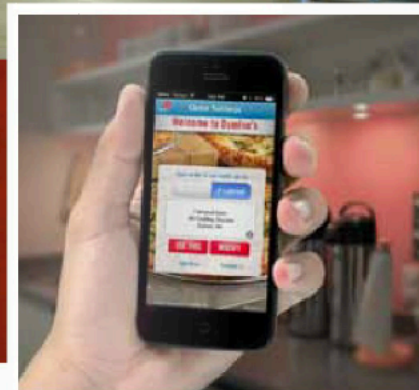
"We work with all different sizes of companies to create mobile apps," Camp says. As an example, Detroit Labs helped build the app that customers use to order a Domino's pizza and have it delivered. "To the customer, the app looks beautiful and is simple to

use. They can watch their pizza being made and delivered on the app's 'Pizza Tracker.' To order again, they can tap the app and easily get the same thing they had last time," he says. "The idea is you want the customer to have a positive experience because the easier and more pleasant that experience is, the more they are going to order pizza."

It's working. "That app now accounts for 10 percent of Domino's U.S. sales, so it's a significant part of their business," says Camp. On top of that, users have given the app a rating that hovers around 4.99 on the Apple and Android app stores' rating scale, which goes up to 5. "This app has been download-

ed more than 8 million times, so for such a widely used app, it's amazing to get that high of a rating. We're pretty proud of our part in that," he says.

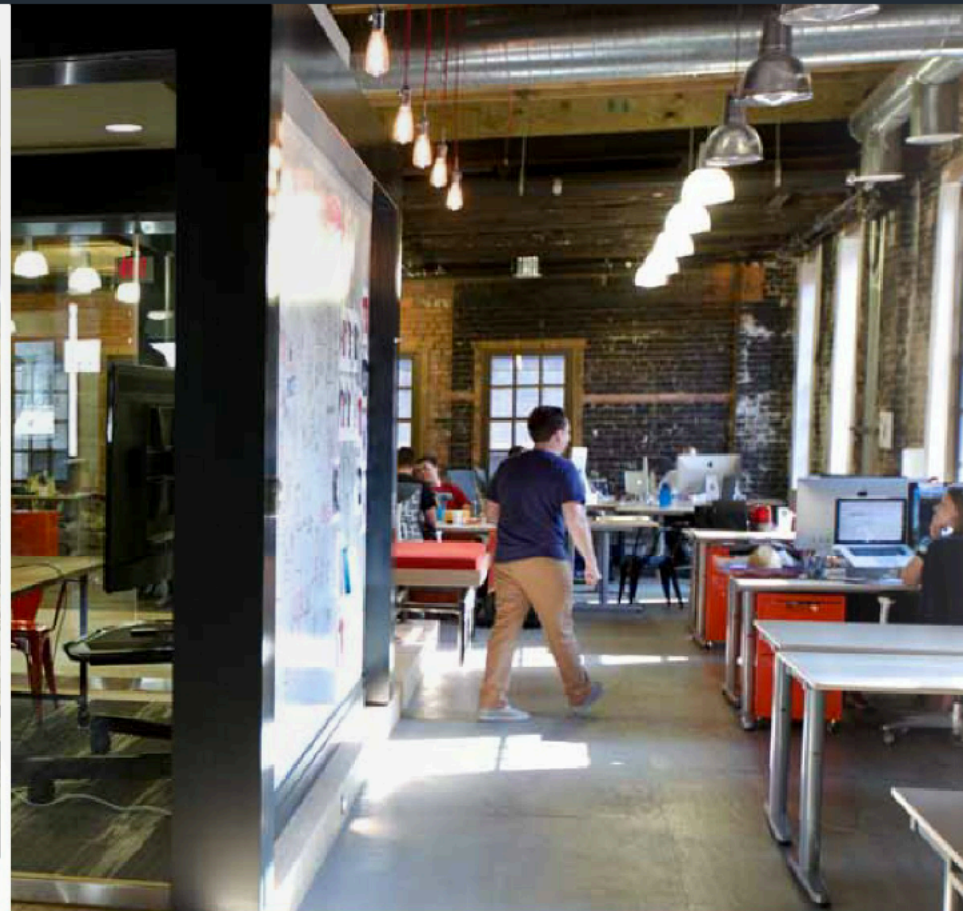
Although the pizza-ordering app may be straightforward from the customer's point of view, it is actually a very complex system on the back end. "Part of the reason is that Domino's has 5,000 stores that are all a bit different. For instance, they do not all have the same menus or the same delivery hours," says Camp. "So the app had to take all of the data that Domino's has and create a way to access and use it, all while creating a seamless customer interface."



TAKING ON NEW CHALLENGES

Detroit Labs' staff thrives on challenges. "One of the things that makes us unique is our robust hiring process that recruits both designers who are artistic but also have some technical skills and developers who have the technical expertise but also understand the user experience," Camp says. "As a result, our people are really cross-dimensional and can apply that broad approach to create a very successful app."

Detroit Labs also created an app for DTE Energy to improve customer interactions in the event of a power outage. "The features of the 'outage app' include allowing a



Above: Detroit Labs' location in the heart of downtown Detroit has helped attract top talent. Left: Domino's pizza-ordering app accounts for 10 percent of the company's U.S. sales.

customer to report a power outage, to get an estimate of when the power will come back on, to receive tips on what else they can or should do during the outage and to find out which other places in the area — the grocery store or a coffee shop, for example — have power," Camp says.

Like the Domino's app, the DTE app is complicated on the back end. "The outage app has to connect to their systems that keep track of each location across their service area and to their scheduling system to anticipate when the power will resume," he says. "We designed the app to make the customer's experience a little

bit more positive during what can be an otherwise difficult time."

APPS FOR EVERYONE

Detroit Labs works with smaller organizations, too. For instance, it is helping a small company develop an educational app to assist people who have learning disabilities. Specifically, the app walks users through individual words with the goal of teaching them to read.

"We've also just started working with the Autism Alliance of Michigan," says Camp, noting that this was an outgrowth of staff interests. "Our employees are >>