

# CASE STUDY: THE VERGE

## OVERVIEW

The Verge, a Webby award-winning online news property focusing on the intersect of art, science, culture and technology, engaged WillowTree Apps to drive mobile engagement with its tech-hungry audience through apps for the iPhone and Android platforms.

## THE CHALLENGES

- Exceed expectations of a highly mobilized target audience through delivery of a best-in-class mobile experience.
- Extend The Verge's video and audio experiences to mobile platforms in a brand-worthy way.
- Ensure cross-platform continuity by leveraging VOX Media's APIs.
- Enable social sharing, great comment threading and other features to deliver on The Verge's mission to provide content, community and data.
- Secure a long-term strategic partner in mobile to stay ahead of trends and strengthen valuable relationships with advertisers and key industry players.
- Meet demand to support Google+ in the mobile apps.

## WHY WILLOWTREE?

When disaster struck at the Boston Marathon, The Verge covered the event through the angle of technology—how might the digital recordings of the citizens who were there affect the investigation? Is it okay to shut down cell towers for security reasons? The Verge, a Vox Media online property launched in 2011, covers news and trends for a sophisticated audience that is hungry for a tech-angle on news, culture, science and the arts. And the mostly male audience, typically ranging from 25 to 40 years old and highly educated, is as passionate about the way they get their news as about the news itself.

Trei Brundrett oversees a team of about 40 designers, developers and product managers. Now that he's worked with WillowTree for almost two years, Brundrett realizes one of their most valuable contributions wasn't even on the criteria list – a positive attitude.

"Positivity is not to be underestimated," said Brundrett. "It drives great outcomes. I think it's a key reason that the WillowTree folks are such incredible collaborators. We can throw anything at them—and I believe we are a demanding client—and they just figure it out. They do more than just take direction, they engage with us to say 'let's create something really great here.'"

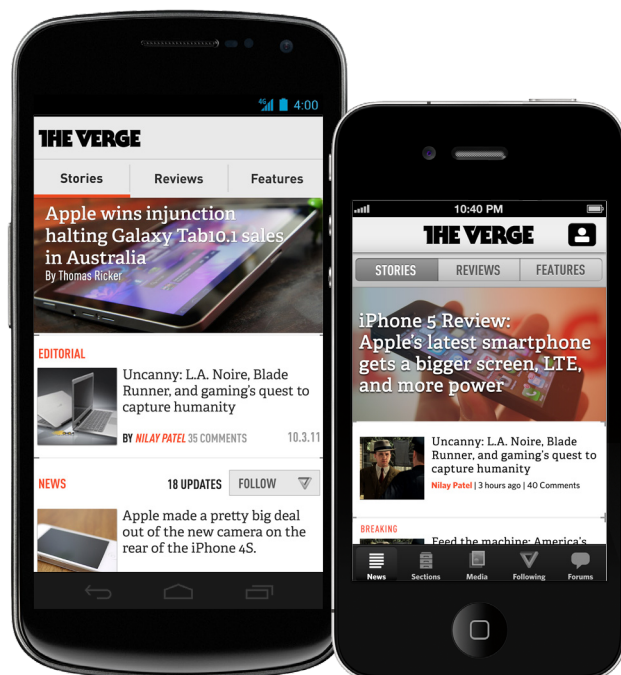
## THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

The apps, released in early 2012 when The Verge was barely a year old, have brought that something really great to readers, advertisers and even The Verge staff. Great mobility is part of The Verge brand, which reinforces advertiser's sense that they are reaching their target audience in the way they want to be reached. It also helps attract and retain the "digital native" talent that writes for The Verge, which won a coveted "Webby" award in 2013.

WillowTree had executed well on behalf of SB Nation, a Vox Media property focusing on

sports. They then engaged with The Verge to deliver apps in record time, noted Brundrett.

One challenge was to integrate Vox's internal digital media platform, Chorus, within the mobile implementation to ensure a great cross-platform user experience. WillowTree designers and engineers worked closely with the Vox product



**"We needed best-in-class mobile applications. Our audience simply expects it and they let us know. Their high standards drove our key criteria – solid technology, design excellence and creativity. We needed a mobile partner with great collaboration skills who could do more than simply implement what we told them. We found all that in WillowTree".**

**THE VERGE**  
Trei Brundrett  
Chief Product Officer at Vox Media

team to optimize existing APIs for mobile. WillowTree successfully modified Chorus' APIs to work within the mobile apps. Integrating great video and audio natively into the mobile apps was critical, noted Brundrett. The Verge is known for rich media content including two popular shows, On The Verge and Top Shelf, as well as mini-documentaries, and Vox wanted these experiences to extend to mobile devices without compromise.

"WillowTree worked hard to integrate these API's into iOS to create a native integration for our branded video and audio experiences," said Brundrett. "Video is a core offering for us and it had to cross platforms well."

### TRUE MOBILE ENGAGEMENT

The advanced streaming integration allows users to watch videos straight from the app without migrating to a browser or other source. Audio streams can be heard within the app or when the app is in the background. Users can browse photo galleries, share comments and post articles directly to social sites all while using The Verge app.

"WillowTree really got that we provide not only great content, but the community around it," said Brundrett. "They built in a lot of social sharing to the apps. We love the great comment threading, which allows users to easily see what they've read and what they haven't."

WillowTree has continued to iterate and refine the apps to help The Verge stay ahead of mobile trends.

"Our WillowTree team embraces whatever we throw at them. This is critical because I need to have a lot of confidence in my resources and they've earned that confidence," he added.

One example of this involves Google. Vox Media partnered with Google as an early adopter of Google+ Sign-In functionality for their users. A consistent implementation across all platforms required WillowTree's assistance for completing the native application integration. WillowTree provided staging builds for review and testing to ensure that data was functional and displayed correctly prior to deployment.

"WillowTree has helped us strengthen our relationship with Google, clearly a key player these days in everyone's business mix," noted Brundrett. "WillowTree is a valuable partner."

The native mobile apps provided an opportunity to enhance StoryStreams – a format developed by Vox Media and used for SB Nation and The Verge. StoryStreams helps deliver breaking news and updates to mobile users. The official news partner of the Consumer Electronics Show, The Verge had to have a stellar mobile experience for all kinds of content, especially video and audio.

"We're in the media business, so sustaining user engagement is key. We provide both content and community and WillowTree has helped us to deliver that in ways some of our users have described as – addictive!"

With more than a third of traffic coming to The Verge now from mobile, clearly this is the kind of habit-forming practice they want to encourage in the future. ●



### ABOUT WILLOWTREE APPS

WillowTree Apps, one of the most trusted and respected mobile development companies in the US, is admired for its ability to help clients create and implement mobile strategies that help solve business challenges. The company's designers and developers are experts across the nuances of iPhone, iPad, Android, Mobile Web (HTML5), Windows Mobile, and Blackberry platform best practices. The entire team is located in its Charlottesville, VA headquarters. No work is ever outsourced overseas.

### PRODUCTS & SERVICES

- Backend Integration & API Development
- Emerging Platforms
- Middleware Deployment
- Mobile Commerce
- Mobile Design
- Mobile Enterprise
- Mobile Marketing
- Mobile Strategy
- Mobile Web Development
- Native Application Development

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