

[<< Back to MediaPost](#)**MediaPost**NEWS

MobileMarketing DAILY

Mobile Intelligencer

Zippo Keeps The App Flame Burning

Mark Walsh, Aug 12, 2009 01:45 PM



With its virtual lighter app for the iPhone hitting 5 million downloads, Zippo Manufacturing Company is [touting](#) the milestone along with new efforts to keep the momentum going. What started out as a novelty—an app that mimics the look and feel of a Zippo lighter complete with animated flame—has become, well, a novelty with legs.

Developed by Moderati, it still ranks as the top free lifestyle app in the App Store almost a year after its debut. Now Zippo is capitalizing on its popularity by launching a 99-cent premium version this fall that will allow users to personalize their fake lighters with downloadable skins, designs, and images. Whether adopting the “freemium” model for the app pays off will be interesting to see.

But for Zippo the virtual lighter will remain chiefly a branding tool rather than an e-commerce play, like most other marketers' iPhone apps. In the last year, the Zippo app became the model for a fun, clever approach to branding via the iPhone as Kraft's iFood Assistant recipe app became the prototype utility app. (Strangely, both are grouped together in the lifestyles category in the App Store.)

Replicating the success of the Zippo app for other brands isn't as easy as flicking open a lighter, though. For one thing, it happens to be a perfect substitute for the cultural phenomenon of people holding lighters aloft at concerts and waving them in sync with the music. Zippo was also building on its cachet as a classic American brand like Harley Davidson or Converse that's repackaged itself to connect with a new generation of consumers.

The company also introduced the virtual lighter at a time when the App Store wasn't quite so crowded (70,000 apps and counting) and it wasn't as hard to get noticed. Plus, even Zippo had no idea the app would take off. Most marketers creating iPhone apps are better off focusing on utility, and if their creation happens to be fun on top of that, then all the better.