



Mixed-up Guide to the Games

Olympics app poorly organized

What happens when you bring together a bunch of diverse, talented people from all over the world to work on a common goal? You're bound to get some extraordinary moments of individual and cooperative excellence. You're also likely to get a good deal of confusion, and many efforts falling short of goals.

That's usually the case with the Olympics. It also happens to



KEVIN O'NEILL
InSites

be the case with **Sochi 2014 Guide**, the app for iOS and Android devices from ANO Organizing Committee "Sochi 2014." It has some features that really shine, but navigating around the app feels like trying to find your way through the Caucasus Mountains without a guide. The scenery is beautiful, but you have no idea where you're going.

Guide to the games

The purpose of this app is to be your complete guide to the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia, which began this week. It has schedules of events and competitions, information on venues, interactive maps of all of the locations, photos, videos and more.

If you were planning on going to the Olympics, you're probably already there, but this app would have helped you plan your trip. You can purchase tickets, book travel arrangements and find lodging within the app. You also can investi-

gate local transportation options and plan routes between the various venues in Sochi.

The competition venues are divided into two main areas, about a 30-minute train ride apart. The Coastal Cluster, on the Black Sea, is where most of the skating and indoor events will be held. The Mountain Cluster is, as the name implies, up in the mountains where the skiing and snowboarding events will be held.

Check out the venues

The app has descriptions, lists of events, photos, maps and videos of all of the facilities at both venues. All of these features worked well for me except for the videos, none of which I could get to play on my iPad. Some of the photos are spectacular, such as scenes of airborne ski jumpers in front of snow-capped mountains under clear blue skies, or a line of speed skaters in brightly colored spandex racing around a curve, or curvaceous, glass-covered buildings nestled among jagged mountain peaks.

One feature I wasn't able to test, because the games hadn't started when I wrote this, is the competition results. You can look up the time and place of every single contest, from alpine skiing to bobsledding to curling, and check the results. The app will update results with times and medal counts as the games play out.

Some of the other features of the app are a news feed, an Olympic torch relay tracker, local places of interest, an online shop, favorites and a search function.

It all sounds pretty good — lots of interesting content and useful information with stunning visuals. But just like the Olympic games, for every inspiring victory, like the U.S. hockey team's win over the Soviets in 1980, or Kerri Strug sealing the win of the first team gold medal for the U.S. women's gymnastics team with a badly injured ankle in 1996, there are unexpected disappointments. Mary Decker, America's favorite to win gold in track trips over Zola Budd in 1984, or Lolo Jones, a favorite of many to grab the gold for the U.S. in hurdles, trips over one of them in 2008. This app has its share of trips and missteps.

Lack of organization

Its biggest problem is one of design. A good design not only looks good, but also helps guide the user intuitively through its various functions and features. Navigating around this app is a struggle. The interface is crowded and confusing. I kept discovering new features as I explored it, but would often have a hard time finding them again. The organization of almost everything on this app needs to be revisited.

There's no main page that functions as a clear guide to all of the features. Or if there is, I couldn't find it. I already mentioned the malfunctioning video, but there also are issues with typographical errors and poor translation into English of some of the content. This guide would be much more useful if it were easier to use.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a graphic artist for The Times-Tribune. Contact him at koneill@timeshamrock.com with links to your favorite websites.