

CHILL OUT

Moment Of Zen

MEDITATION APPS ARE HELPING CONSUMERS FIND PEACE IN A HYPER-CONNECTED WORLD. **BY CHRISTINE BIRKNER**

As stress levels rise and attention spans shrink, consumers are increasingly using technology to tap into zen. Approximately 18 million Americans practice meditation, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and, much like yoga, meditation apps are exploding in the marketplace.

Apps like Calm, Headspace and The Mindfulness App offer both monthly and yearly subscriptions. Meditation sessions, which can be customized by length and according to mood, are dedicated to improving physical and emotional well-being, increasing focus, managing stress and getting a better night's sleep.

Meditation is based on principles of Buddhism and has been practiced for thousands of years, but its current popularity is due, in part, to decreased stigmas around discussing mental health, said Alex Tew, co-founder and co-CEO of Calm, which averaged 30,000 new users per day in the last year.

"For a long time, people associated meditation with spirituality or religion or general weirdness," Tew explained. "But now, in some places, it's almost a badge of honor to meditate, which is a total 180 shift. Especially in Silicon Valley, it's surprising if somebody doesn't meditate. It's the same as physical exercise—it's becoming a bigger trend because people are realizing that it's good for them."

There's also an increasing realization about how emotional well-being impacts physical health. Forty-six percent of U.S. consumers say that keeping a positive mindset is one way they manage their overall health, and 40 percent say that stress is their main source of body pains, like headaches and backaches, according to Mintel.

"People are getting more savvy about how chronic stress can lead to chronic ill health," said Carli Gernot, manager of trends, North America at Mintel.

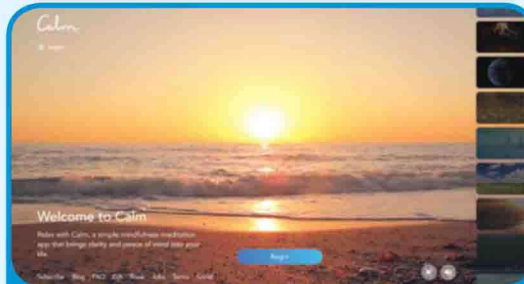
The turbulent political climate is also playing a part in these apps' growing popularity. "Increasingly, people are dissatisfied



MIND THE APP

THE MINDFULNESS APP

Launched in: **2011**
Downloads to date: **1.7 million**
Monthly subscription: **\$9.99**
Vibe: Global focus with 30 languages



CALM

Launched in: **2012** | Downloads to date: **8 million**
Monthly subscription: **\$12.99**
Vibe: Ambient background sounds, bedtime stories

Headspace is a gym membership for your mind



HEADSPACE

Launched in: **2010**
Downloads to date: **11 million**
Monthly subscription: **\$12.95**
Vibe: Guided sessions by expert instructors

with the direction of the country, and if they're stressed out about what's going on, these apps can help them be more present and manage stress," said Alexis Fragale, director of consumer insights at Mindshare North America. Calm's Tew, meanwhile, noted that his app's downloads have doubled in the months following Trump's election.

Each meditation app tends to have its own particular vibe. The Mindfulness App has a global focus—it's available in 30 languages—while Headspace aims to stand out through the volume of its content and by emphasizing the expertise of its instructors. Calm offers unique services like Sleep Stories, bedtime tales for adults, as well as ambient background sounds featuring nature scenery.

The Mindfulness App, which primarily targets urban consumers 35 to 50, promotes itself through Instagram influencers and paid ads on Facebook. The company also partnered with El Al Airlines and Mini to offer meditation sessions on flights and in London traffic,

respectively, and tested the app on 100 hospital employees in Sweden and the U.K. to measure its impact on staffers' trauma management and interactions with patients. "It's been proven over and over again that meditation reduces stress and helps people with compassion," said Magnus Fridh, the app's co-founder.

Headspace has partnered with seven major airlines to offer passengers content on staying calm through flight delays, avoiding jet lag and sleeping better on board, and worked with the British Olympic team's athletes and sports psychologists to improve performance during the 2012 and 2016 games. "Partnerships have been key to our success, and the sheer depth and breadth of our content helps differentiate us, too," said Headspace co-founder Rich Pierson.

Calm advertises on Facebook and through search ads in the Apple app store, but reaches 99 percent of its customers through word of mouth. "When people have a good experience and feel the benefits of meditation, it turns them into evangelists," Tew said.

Analysts see the meditation trend expanding to include wearables, which could track your pulse and offer ideas on stress management, or expanding in the retail sector. (A recent example is Lululemon, which installed a meditation bus outside of one of its London stores.)

"The trend is going to continue to grow," agreed Tew. "We've become good in the West with advances in medicine, but the modern ailments of our time, anxiety and depression, are more about your state of mind than your body."

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