THE GUIDE TO Mobile App Ratings & Reviews

BROUGHT TO YOU BY: Apptentive
If you’re looking to boost ratings for your app, you already recognize the importance of ratings and reviews.

In a world where first impressions are everything and at a time when consumers are growing ever skeptical of marketing, peer recommendations in the form of app store ratings and reviews stand alone as the single greatest driver of discovery and conversion.

To help illustrate this point, we surveyed hundreds of active app users and analyzed one hundred top-ranked apps to see just how important star ratings are to an app’s success.

This guide will teach you everything you need to know about app store ratings and reviews and leave you with the actionable steps you need to boost your ratings today.

Why Ratings and Reviews Matter

90% of consumers consider star ratings to be an essential part of their evaluation of a new app.

79% of consumers check ratings and reviews before downloading an app

53% check ratings and reviews before updating an app

55% check ratings and reviews before making an in-app transaction

4 out of 10 consider reviews equally or more trustworthy than personal recommendations.

Source: Apptentive ratings and reviews survey, 2015
Ratings are Key to Standing Out in a Crowded App Store

A high volume of positive ratings will boost your app to the top of the charts and search queries, thereby making your app more discoverable to new customers.

**Better ratings**

= More prominent ranks

*An app’s average star rating is directly correlated with its rank*

**More ratings**

= More prominent ranks

*Apps with more ratings tend to rank higher in the app stores*

- **3.94**
  - The average rating of an iOS Top 100 app
- **4.32**
  - The average rating of an Android Top 100 app
- **196k**
  - The number of times the average iOS Top 100 app has been rated
- **3.1M**
  - The number of times the average Android Top 100 app has been rated

Source: *Deconstructing the App Store rankings formula, 2015*

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Customers Won’t Download a 3-Star App

Ratings and reviews continue to play a major role in your app’s growth long after consumers have found their way to your app store product page. They serve as social proof to indicate your app’s quality in an otherwise blind evaluation process.

To see just how strong this impact is, we asked hundreds of app users across the United States what they perceived to be the minimum acceptable star rating an app needs before they would even consider downloading it. **Here’s what they said:**

Source: *Apptentive brand management survey, 2016*
What is the minimum star rating needed for consumers to download an app?

![Bar chart showing percentage of consumers willing to consider downloading an app based on star ratings.]

% of consumers willing to consider downloading an app

Source: Apptentive brand management survey, 2016

- Jumping from 2 to 3 stars can effectively increase app store conversion by 306%.
- Jumping from 3 to 4 stars can effectively increase app store conversion by 92%.
Before you can take control over your ratings, it’s important to understand the reasons why they’re currently a little underwhelming. Only then can you make the inherent biases in app store ratings work for you, rather than against you.

A poorly rated app is not necessarily a bad app. Nor is an app with exceptional reviews necessarily a good app. When it comes to assessing quality and experience, app store ratings and reviews are, simply, not the best indicators.

The reason your app doesn’t have five stars can largely be attributed to basic statistics.

When we consider a ratings scale, we’re psychologically predisposed to assume a normal distribution. That is, we expect the majority of people to give an ‘average’ rating in the middle of the scale (three stars) and a tapering minority to give an ‘extreme’ rating (one or five stars). Visually, we’d expect our ratings distribution to take the shape of a bell curve:

Unfortunately (or fortunately, if you know how to trick the system), this isn’t a distribution most apps experience. Customers in the middle of this bell—a group we call the ‘Silent Majority’—rarely leave ratings or reviews. They simply can't be bothered to leave an app, sign into the app store, and write a review for an app they neither love nor hate. Those on either end of the spectrum, however, do have a strong enough reaction to your app to leave a review. We call these groups your biggest fans and your biggest critics.
As a result, the bell curve we expect to see in our ratings distribution takes a 180-degree spin, leaving us with a dip in the middle (with few customers leaving three-star reviews) and peaks at either end (with a disproportionate number of one-star and five-star reviews). The end result is what statisticians refer to as a bimodal distribution:

![Bell Curve Diagram]

This is a distribution shared by virtually all apps, reaching even into the upper echelons of the top charts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>App</th>
<th>Star Rating</th>
<th>Number of Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Twitter for iOS</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>484,065 Reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youtube for Android</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1,631,899 Reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uber for iOS</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>101,335 Reviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These three incredibly successful apps all suffer from a disproportionate number of one-star reviews. And while at first glance, this is compensated for by an equally disproportionate number of five-star reviews, research into the customer experience reveals a different story.

Consumers are 22% more likely to leave a review after a negative customer experience than a positive one.

Source: Apptentive 2016 Brand Reputation Management Survey
Thus, while ratings at either end of the extreme are disproportionate to true customer sentiment, your one-star reviews are even further inflated by a negative bias—and drag down your average rating as a result.

In the examples above, Twitter’s critics don’t outnumber the app’s lovers. Nor are YouTube or Uber’s dissatisfied customers anywhere near as voluminous as the ratings would suggest. It’s just a matter of biased data.

Fortunately, as we’ll see in the next section, these biases can just as easily be used for our advantage.


Recall from the previous section that the average app has a ratings distribution resembling something of a valley:

\[
\text{Number of Ratings} \quad \begin{array}{c|c|c|c|c|c|c} 
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \\
\end{array}
\]

This distribution is bad news to marketers as it means one thing: **Your critics are your most vocal customers.** Your critics have the greatest reason to be vocal. Perhaps they feel annoyed or cheated after an unexpected crash. Whatever the reason, they want their frustration known.

The vast majority of your customers genuinely enjoy your app. Yet, with the exception of a small minority who really love your app and want to invest the time to give you props, this group has little incentive to leave a review. They like your app but have little to say beyond: **It just works.**
Like a good user interface, a customer’s experience with your app is meant to be subtle. When everything works as expected, we don’t notice the elegance of the design. It just works. Yet, when we find a broken link or any other hiccup in the interface, we experience frustration. We know that something is wrong. Suddenly, the interface emerges from the background and leaves a conscious impression.

The truth is, apps are held to a very high standard. We expect them to work perfectly and have little motivation to review an app that simply meets our expectations, no matter how high those may be. It is only when apps fall short of our expectations that we put them under scrutiny.

**To get better ratings, we have to put positive experiences under the same scrutiny.** We have to bring the user interface, mechanics, and other background elements to the surface and proactively nudge customers to consider their experience.

At Apptentive, we’ve found the best way to do this is by asking a simple stop question: Do you love this app?

When this question flashes across a customer’s screen, they’re forced to pause and consider their experience, asking themselves:

- What are my expectations for this app?
- How well does this app meet those expectations?

If they’re like the majority of customers who find that your app “just works,” they’ll now recognize what a blessing this is and how a seamless, natural experience allowed them to use the app to fulfill their needs rather than spending time confused, lost, or frustrated. **These customers are your fans.** They’ve self-selected into a pool of evangelists and have no reason to leave you anything other than a five-star review, making them the perfect group to solicit reviews from.

**Those who have considered these questions but recognized some shortcomings in your app are your sources of feedback.** They’ve evaluated your app, know what they’re looking for, and can tell you where your app could use improvement.
When this type of feedback surfaces, it typically takes the form of a one-star review. These reviewers don’t hate your app, but they want more, and have ticked the one-star box to mark their message as important in the hopes that it will reach a developer’s eyes.

With your customers segmented into your fans and your sources of feedback, all you need to do now is to direct them to the most appropriate communication channel.

Your fans have nothing but positive feedback. These are your prime reviewers, who can take that feedback and share it with the world in the form of a public review. Your feedback sources have mixed reviews that deserve acknowledgement. You want a channel where you can engage with these customers one-on-one, hear out their feedback, and start a conversation to dive deeper into the valuable insights they have to offer. For this feedback, a one-way channel like the app stores will do little to improve anyone’s experience. Instead, you want something more personal (like email or in-app chat), where you can give the feedback the attention it deserves.

What sorts of feedback loops exist outside of the App Store?

In-app messaging, surveys, and open-ended forms are all viable alternatives that keep customers in your app and feedback private.

For more on these tools, visit [www.apptentive.com](http://www.apptentive.com).

Visually, collecting in-app feedback should look something like this:
Those who respond to your initial question saying they love your app have pre-selected themselves into your fan group. After answering this question, they should be thanked and asked if they would mind elaborating on their answer in an app store review. Those who do not love your app have pre-selected themselves into your feedback sources group and should be able to voice their suggestions directly to your team, in the form of an in-app survey, feedback form, support email, or any other private feedback tool.

**By tailoring your messaging to customer affinity, you’re able to cover three parts at once:**

1. Intercepting negative reviews while collecting more customer feedback in a controlled environment;
2. Activating more of your fans and your “silent majority” (those who like your app but previously had little incentive to review your app) to leave a rating or review after taking the time to reflect on your app’s quality; and,
3. Growing both rating count and your average rating as a result of the previous two points.

Suddenly, your ratings distribution is transformed, with a diminished left peak and a dramatically taller right peak:
Effective ratings prompts do more than just target your biggest fans. They give you total control over your entire campaign to optimize your ratings and reviews.

To get the best results, consider:

**Whom you prompt**

Beyond segmenting your customers by affinity, dive into demographics and psychographics to identify your perfect reviewer. Get as granular as you like, targeting by app version, device type, how many times a customer has launched your app, what features that customer has used, and other attributes that can make a big difference to your rating.

As a matter of best practice, we recommend targeting only those who have sufficient knowledge of your app to leave a review (say, only those customers who have launched your app five or more times). For example, take a look at how we approach targeting within the Apptentive dashboard:

**How you prompt**

Not all ratings prompts were built equal. Seemingly minute differences in the way you go about asking for a rating can dramatically alter your response rates. For example, we’ve found that asking for a rating is 5-10 times more effective than asking for a five-star rating, as customers perceive the latter as presumptuous.

Remember that you’re asking customers for a favor. Use your pleases and thank-you’s, and always give them a one-tap option to dismiss the prompt.
When and how often you prompt

Recall that the best user interfaces run in the background, hardly noticeable when a customer is using them. By prompting for a review, you bring all of these background elements to the surface and ask customers to reflect on their experience. While this reminder is instrumental in boosting your rating count, it can also distract or even irritate customers who just want to use your app.

We recommend always being cognizant of your customers’ time and communication preferences. As a matter of best practice, we suggest showing a ratings prompt only once per app update so as to avoid unnecessary interruptions, especially for those who have already rated your app as the app stores do not share this data with publishers.

Where you prompt

There’s nothing worse than launching an app for the first time and immediately being asked to leave a rating for an app you know nothing about.

Whether it’s to make a purchase, compare prices, or complete a level, customers launch your app with a specific task in mind. To improve your odds, wait to ask for reviews until the customer has completed this action.

Beyond these key engagement points, you can boost your ratings by building subtle asks into the design of your app (e.g., a “Rate this App” button in your app’s navigation that links to the App Store) and your brand communication (e.g., in your app store product page’s description and “What’s New” fields):

For example, letgo leverages its “What’s New” update description to both ask for ratings and intercept negative reviews by providing a support email for suggestions.
And **Photo Editor Pro** keeps ratings top-of-mind with a dedicated “Rate Me” button in its menu.

### Ready to Boost Your Ratings?

Reaching the hallowed halls of the five-star app club isn’t magic. It’s science. And art.

It takes a true understanding of your customer and the nature of app store reviews. It takes showing the right prompt to the right person at the right place and the right time.

At Apptentive, we'll work with you to identify each of those variables before optimizing both your rating count and your average review. Our intelligent ratings prompts can be deployed anywhere in your app, granularly targeted, and optimized for response rates—all with no coding required beyond the initial integration.

We work with hundreds of top apps who were suffering from the same bimodal rating distribution documented in this guide. And within weeks, we leveraged these same distributions to deliver some pretty remarkable results, like those below:
Within three weeks, this customer saw a 107x increase in ratings and a two-star increase in its average rating. And it all it took was a 30-minute integration.

Real customer results from a Top 100 App, charted in App Annie using historical App Store data.

So, still want a five-star app?
Visit www.apptentive.com to get started today.

About Apptentive

Apptentive’s mobile customer engagement software helps companies listen to, engage with, and retain their customers. The product gives brands the opportunity to identify who to talk to, intelligently engage user segments, and mobilize customers to take action through in-app messages, surveys, and ratings prompts. Integrated into thousands of mobile apps, Apptentive helps companies engage mobile customers, boost app ratings, drive downloads, and earn customer loyalty.