How to
LAUNCH AN APP

Knowing the stages of app development and mastering the launch phase

Mistakes to avoid when launching an app & the 4 phases

You have an amazing idea for a mobile app. You envision making it live and earning some extra money - enough so that you can, in time, make it to your full-time job. Therefore, you invested in getting a developer who will build it based on your ideas.

You believe that the most difficult part will be making the app. After all the hard work put into developing it, you're excited to publish it to the app store. Now with the toughest part behind you (or so you think), you expect massive amounts of downloads; you expect money to start flooding in. But then, weeks pass by, and your investment is not paying off. Wonder why?

Let's look at the stages of app development and what to do to avoid this scenario.

Ideation Phase

When you are starting with your new app, answer the questions below first:

Is your idea interesting enough for other people?

You have discovered an idea which you believe is worth investing in. Before writing a single line of code, research if there are people who are truly interested in your app. Who are they? And, what are their pain points?

The easiest way to validate your idea is to create a landing page with a minimal viable product (MVP), which is a version of your product with just enough features to attract early adopters without having a final, fully developed product. A video, some images, and text explanation should be enough to collect valuable data and gauge interest; start collecting emails of people interested in knowing when the app will be published so can notify them immediately.

Who is your target audience?

After collecting their emails, you can start focus groups and surveys to understand who they are and if the features you are trying to build are really the ones that will help them to solve their issues.

How big is your market?

Make sure that your app appeals to an audience that's big enough to cover your costs. Making your product very tailored for a specific group of people and investing in a very niche target audience may result in a loss.

Are people willing to pay for what your app offers?

If you have an audience that's big enough, and you expect them to pay for the app and cover your costs (and ideally bring more money) - ask them what their ideal price would be, and if they are willing to pay anything at all.

If your idea is solving a tiny problem in their lives, or if there's an app already offering the same thing, they might not be willing to pay for it.

However, even if you find out that people want the app for free, after getting enough downloads, you can start serving them in-app ads or you can partner up with organizations who have the same target audience as you. This can bring you additional revenue in case you have trouble monetizing your users directly through one time or subscription payment model.

Is your app unique, or are there many apps with the same offering already?

If you have a unique value proposition distinguishing you from competitors, or if there are no competitors in the space you want to operate in, congratulations! This isn't an easy accomplishment, so be sure you're confident in the answer to this question.

Who are your competitors?

Chances are, there is already an app out there which is offering a similar solution like yours. Understanding who your competitors are, and what they do to acquire and retain their users, will give you valuable information.

1a. How to find the perfect audience for your new app

According to Business Insider, the most challenging aspect of app creation is actually marketing. It's not just enough to build a great product if no one gets to see it! Marketing deals with selling the product, enticing the customer to install, play and pay.

Nail down your buyer personas

Imagine a local town market with customers and sellers bargaining for the best price. Any merchant will attest to the reality that it's much easier to sell something if you have the chance to convince the buyer in person. But this selling technique isn't possible with mobile apps, as the potential customer is remote, staring at a glaring screen - not at your smiling face!

For this reason, we must first envision and create representations of our target audience - or a buyer persona. Who are they? What do they do? What problems are they facing on a day-to-day basis? How does your app help them solve this problem?

Create a couple of such personas, thus segmenting your own market. For example, Candy Crush Saga has many different users - each vastly different with differing mindsets, habits and interests. The game is played by young children after school, but there's also a 25-year-old commuter who plays it daily on the bus to and from work. And then there's a 35-year-old mother that plays it while waiting for her son to finish football practice.

Be thorough. If you can't think of any such persona, then maybe your app isn't meeting a needs or solving a problem, and no one will actually use it.

Example of a buyer persona

Conduct surveys

An old but trusted method of doing social research is through surveys. You can ask random people what they think about your app, who they think it's for, etc. Make custom surveys for your existing customer base, as their opinions are the most valuable.

If you've haven't used surveys before, you may have doubts about how authentic people are when answering survey questions; people can indeed be less honest when answering surveys because of hidden biases. To fix this, you may decide to conduct in-person interviews with people either on the street or talk to them online through Skype/Google Hangouts.

As long as you're getting some feedback, you're on the right track.

Leverage social Media

Don't forget to foster a connection with your newly attracted users through social media. It's a great way to let them know about all the recent updates, deals and what you think they should know from you.

While doing this follow these 3 simple tips:

1. Use call-to-action words!

2. Tell your audience what you want them to do. Tell them to install, review, have fun!

3. Share benefits, not features

- Users come to use your app, but most likely they will not be able to tell that the easy-scroll feature will greatly benefit them. It's important to emphasize the actual benefits they receive like efficiency increase or smoother swipe

Study the competition

Be sure to look at your competitors' audience. Who are they? And, can you make them switch to your app?

1b. Beat your competition in 5 quick steps

App development is all fun and games, right? Yes! But you have to remember that there is probably a group of people somewhere in the world having just as much fun developing a similar app. Chances are that your idea isn't new and someone has already been there and done that!

But, this is a great thing! You now have an opportunity to research the topic and find out how the same problems were tackled. There are thousands of guides and blogs online talking about starting a business or an app development team. So to save you some time, we have summarized the key concepts into five quick steps. Additionally, we have added a neat competitor research template that you can use!

1. Find your top 10 competitors

To beat your competition you first need to know who they are, what they do, and how they do it. Since you're in the business of making apps, this search should be relatively simple. Just search the theme or keywords for your app using Google, or the app store available to you. See which apps show up. Are they doing the exact thing you're planning to do? How are they getting new customers?

Here, at AGN, we like using a great resource, Apptweak, that lets you track a variety of metrics for mobile apps both on iOS and Android. Check how often your competitors update their app, look at their ranking history, and analyze any sudden spikes. Don't leave any stone unturned; figure out exactly what brought these apps success.

2. Analyze your competition's product

Download their app! See how it works, find out what you like about it and what could be improved. Add or remove these to your app. Make sure that your app doesn't look too similar. Your customers will look at you as a copy-cat and will stick to the original app. Your goal is still to solve a problem but provide a unique, engaging user experience that will keep them coming back for more!

3. Check out their social media

Half of all apps are found and downloaded through word of mouth. Most likely, you discovered your favorite new app from a friend or co-worker who raved about it while you were having your morning coffee, and you couldn't help but be enticed to do a little search on the app store. And, you probably downloaded it too!

That's why social media and marketing, in general, is crucial when it comes to the app business. You want to find the most successful competitor channels and the strategies they use to attract the most attention. Are they sending out newsletters? Maybe you should too!
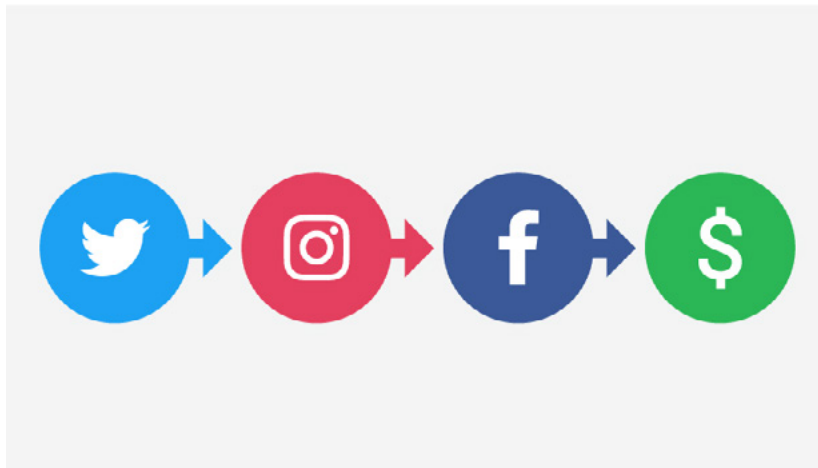
4. Research all the keywords

While keyword bidding may no longer be as effective as it used to be, it is still essential to carving out a niche for your app and maintaining a certain brand image in the eyes of your app's users.

Research the keywords that your competitors rank for - maybe you can outrank them with a small budget. If not, find a gap that you can fill by discovering keywords that haven't yet been grabbed by the thousands of new apps released every day.

5. USE User feedback

Sometimes this is one of the most overlooked aspects. Remember that your app exists only for the people who use it. So the people who actually leave any sort of feedback are probably the most invested in your app. Find out what users are saying about your and your competitors' apps. Do surveys, go through app stores feedback, do a/b testing for your icons and screenshots. Don't leave anything to chance!

We developed a helpful table that you can use and fill out when doing your research. Here it is! Add as many sections that you need to make your research stellar!!

|	App 1	App 2	App 3	App 4
Category				
Platform				
Price				
Audience				
Revenue model				
Unique features				
Customer ratings				
Customer reviews				

1c. iOS, Android or both?

One of the biggest questions for app developers is: should I launch on iOS or Android, or both? The answer is not so simple because there are important variables to consider.

The first is that - depending on the size of your operation - you may or you may not want to launch on both iOS and Android. The second is your experience in launching apps.

If it's your first time launching an app, you may want to start with one platform to test your users' behavior. Starting with one platform allows you to have easier management over your app and is less of a financial burden in comparison with launching in two platforms. If you fail on the platform that you've tried, you can learn from your mistakes and adjust your strategy before investing in developing in the other platform.

Choosing which platform to start with can be difficult. Each platform can yield many advantages and disadvantages. Let's take a closer look!
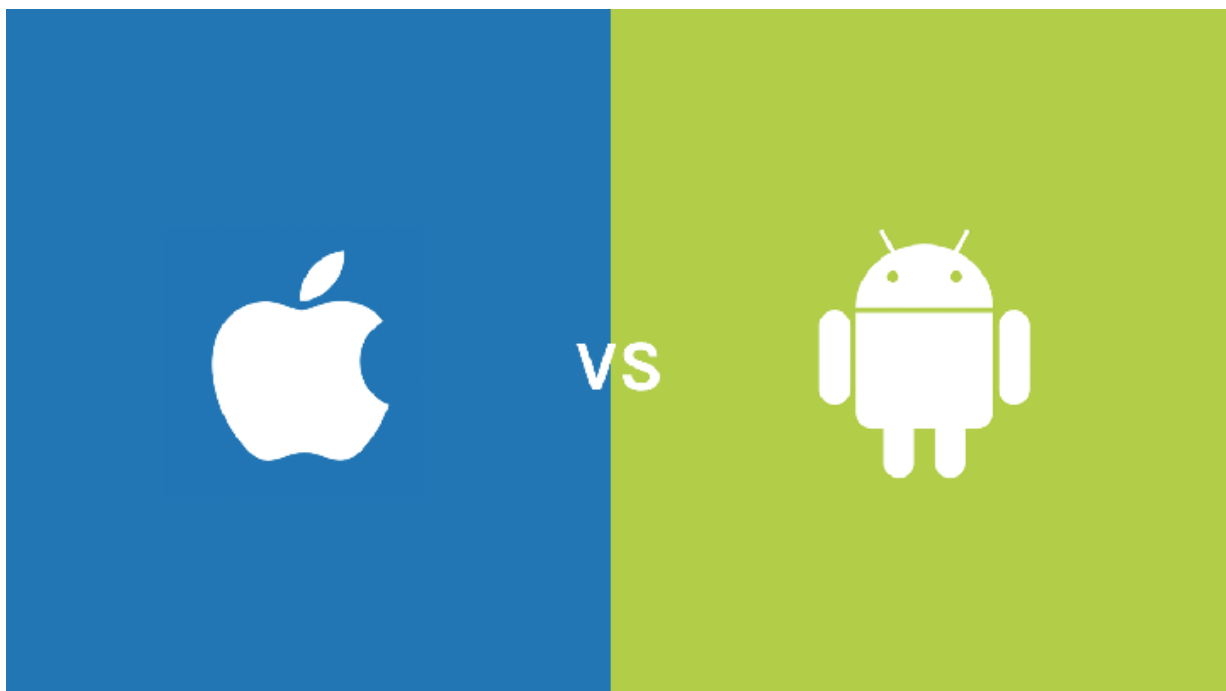
Google Play launch pros:

1. **Google Play has an easier approval process in place than iOS.**

   Google Play's approval process only takes a few hours after you have submitted your app. Google's main goal is to ensure that apps are not violating any Google guidelines. The app is first examined by an automated tool that focuses on malware, spyware, any copyright violation, and sexually explicit content. After the app passes the machine test, it is sent to a team to be tested manually. If all goes well, your app will be published on the Play Store.

2. **Google Play allows local & global experiments to test your creatives.**

   This is a great feature that Google has, as it allows developers to better-understand their target audience per geographic location. It allows the app to be more easily customized and localized. It also allows developers to filter creatives that are effective for a certain culture and the ones that are not.

3. You can run Google UAC ads without any attribution trackers.

Attribution trackers are a great asset to use when you want to monitor and make touchpoints with your users' actions. However, it can also be tedious and expensive when constantly required. The Play Store leaves the option of using attribution trackers to the developers.

Google Play launch cons:

1. Google Play in-purchase patterns are different than iOS.

According to Appsflyer, on average, iOS users spend 2.5 times more on mobile apps than Android users.

2. You can't leverage Apple Search Ads, which is high-intent based.

Apple Search Ads is a highly efficient tool for developers to use. It can help your app stand out from the crowd, lower CPI, and allows cross sell and upsell opportunities.

3. Only Android users can use Android apps.

Therefore, when an app is shared via social media or word of mouth, it may not be effective since people with an iOS phone cannot access the app.

iOS launch pros:

1. **Unlike Android, you can leverage Apple Search Ads, which places more emphasis on the users' intent.**

    A more defined intent means that you are able to better select and price your keywords to maximize the numbers of impression you make.

2. **On average, Apple users spend more on apps than Android users.**

    According to Valuewalk, on average, Apple users usually spend more on apps than Android users. In 2018, App Store's net income was over 83 million while Playstores was 51 million. Therefore, the App Store has a higher probability of providing you with a better monetization for your app.

3. **You can get featured by Apple in the editorial section.**

    Being featured on the App Store's editorial section is a key advantage because 42% of all app installs through the App Store comes from discovering featured or ranked apps (Clearbridgemobile).

4. **You can test the performance of your creative assets with Apple Search Ads.**

    This feature allows you to preview your creatives before officially launching. Therefore, you can be sure of how your ads will look and if they will be successful with your targeted audience.

iOS launch cons:

1. **iOS environment is limited for creative assets & meta A/B testing.**

   Currently, App Store Connect doesn't have a testing feature.

2. **Apple has more restrictive rules regarding asset approvals.**

   90% of apps are approved over 48 hrs and 40% of apps are rejected during their first submission. Apple tests and analyzes for any bugs, broken links, false screenshots, repeated submission of similar apps, placeholder content, etc. To ensure your app is approved in its first submission, developers must look through Apple's full app submission guidelines and meet all of its requirements.

3. **You can leverage UAC without an attribution tracker SDK.**

   This is the same for Android and iOS.

4. **Only iOS users can use iOS apps.**

   Therefore, when an app is shared via social media or word of mouth, it may not be effective since people with an Android phone can't access the app.

Launching multiple platforms at the same time is very beneficial for the network effect; however, when it comes to bugs, crashes, and maintenance, two platforms will require more QA & development time as well as marketing and resource allocation.

1d. Prepare An Effective Pitch Deck

Are you a startup? Are you looking to change the world with your ideas? Is financing an issue? Maybe it is time to start looking for potential investors to support your project.

Here at AGN we've compiled 10 key components that are essential to your pitch.

Vision

What's the biggest driving force behind your project, and what's the team's source of motivation? If it's something inspirational and/or ambitious, you must be able to explain it clearly and enthusiastically in 30-45 seconds in front of anyone. Practice!

Validation

A lot of investors look at the team more than the idea itself. After all, your idea has been thought of before, which makes the execution of the development matter most and ultimately depends solely on your team's performance. Introduce yourself and your team, their contributions/achievements and why you value them. Back it up with statistics to make a stronger case.

The problem

Every business works around solving some problem, and every product satisfies a need. Yours should too! Maybe the problem is an obvious one, but do some research first. Find out industry benchmarks before establishing how you bring customers more value. You should be aware of the market you are entering, its size, your future competition and why your solution is better than theirs.

While you need to be very knowledgeable in this area, your investor does not need to know all the nitty-gritty of the problem. Focus on the target audience and how you will competitively fix their problems

The solution

Now that you've set up the problem, propose a solution that will help to solve your potential users' pain points. Be thorough, but concise. Explain any of the assumptions in your business model and how you will plan to solidify these assumptions into something more concrete.

Revenue model

Find out at least two revenue streams that you can tap into right now, and suggest a couple more for the future. Show that you want this to be a successful business and the investor will make his money back even in a worst case scenario.

• Identify KPI's

• Identify primary customer

• Show how you are going to generate revenue

• Show basic math on estimated revenue

• Identify the estimated lifetime value of an average customer

Marketing strategy

For a successful marketing strategy you need to know your audience, know how to appropriately segment it and what will appeal to each of those sub-groups.

• Demographics - (age/country/gender/occupation/location)

• Psychographics - (behavior/habits/lifestyle)

• Do a lot of research and have good designers. Find 2-3 'ideal' customers and think of ways to keep them engaged with your app

• Add target growth rates

Competition

- Mention market presence of top 3 competitors - is their brand too strong?

- Identify your USP (Unique Selling Proposition)

- Provide a SWOT analysis
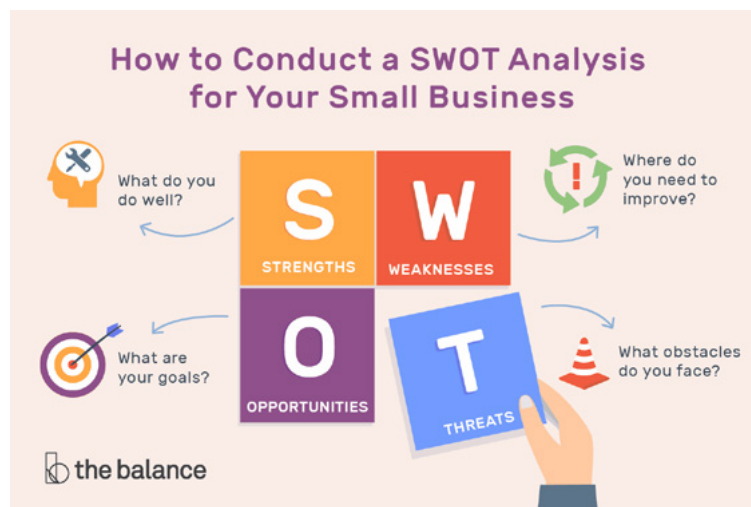
The team

- Go through the tasks that needed to completed

- Identify a lead team member for each task

Master Plan + Final Projections

- Provide a 24-month plan, specifically looking at growth

- Identify a 3-5 year plan for customers, revenue growth, plus total expenses

Investment opportunity

Summarize your project quickly and mention why it's a great idea for your investor to provide you with financial aid for your project. Be gracious and humble, but don't be afraid to brag a bit!

Get your metadata right from the start

Building Phase

You've done your initial research - you know your competition, you've collected emails and found people who are really interested in downloading the app when it launches. How exciting! Now you can finally start building it!

For building an app you will need:

- an entrepreneur with an excellent business mindset (you)

- an experienced developer(s) (external or your CTO)

- a UX designer(s)

- a knowledgeable marketing agency (ideally App Growth Network wink, wink!)

Do NOT hire a developer who is also a UX designer. Being a developer and a designer requires different skills, and it is very difficult - and unlikely - to be an expert in both. Therefore, to build an app that has both fully functioning features and is also easy to use, we strongly suggest hiring these specialists separately.

You already started the marketing process when you researched who your target audience is. But you must continue and grow by working closely with marketing specialists - an experienced team with valuable know-how and expertise - to build an app that will be discovered in the app store and to ensure that its look and feel will be appealing to the right people.

App developers usually do not have enough knowledge about search algorithms in the app stores, nor do they know what keywords and descriptions (metadata) should they use.

Creative elements - such as an icon, screenshots, and video - are also very important to convert your potential users into paying customers, but developers usually lack knowledge or have no interest in creative matters.

Having a marketing team working closely with your developers from the early stages can save you a lot of time, money and headaches in the long run.

2a. Your domain: A home for your app

Creating the right web domain is important. You want your app to grow and for more users to find it. Here are 5 top things to keep in mind when setting up your domain:

1. Make it catchy

While a lot of traffic comes from the app stores and ads, it's important to remember that your website works as the front page/face of your app. Users may stumble across it while browsing the net or doing some shopping, so you need to be able to catch their attention quickly.

On your website you may also have additional information about your team, other apps you are building or other resources that may be helpful for your customers.

2. Choose a memorable name

The right name is essential as people will need to remember it and find you on the app store. For best results, your domain should match your developer name in app stores, so that you're easier to find. You'll also rank higher because of all the backlinks that will organically follow your content.

3. Keep it simple

Remember to keep the design of your homepage simple. Not just because minimalism is cool, but also because it's your main product; you're just trying to sell your app, nothing more. Point the visitor's attention to key features and make it easy for them to get to your app and use it.
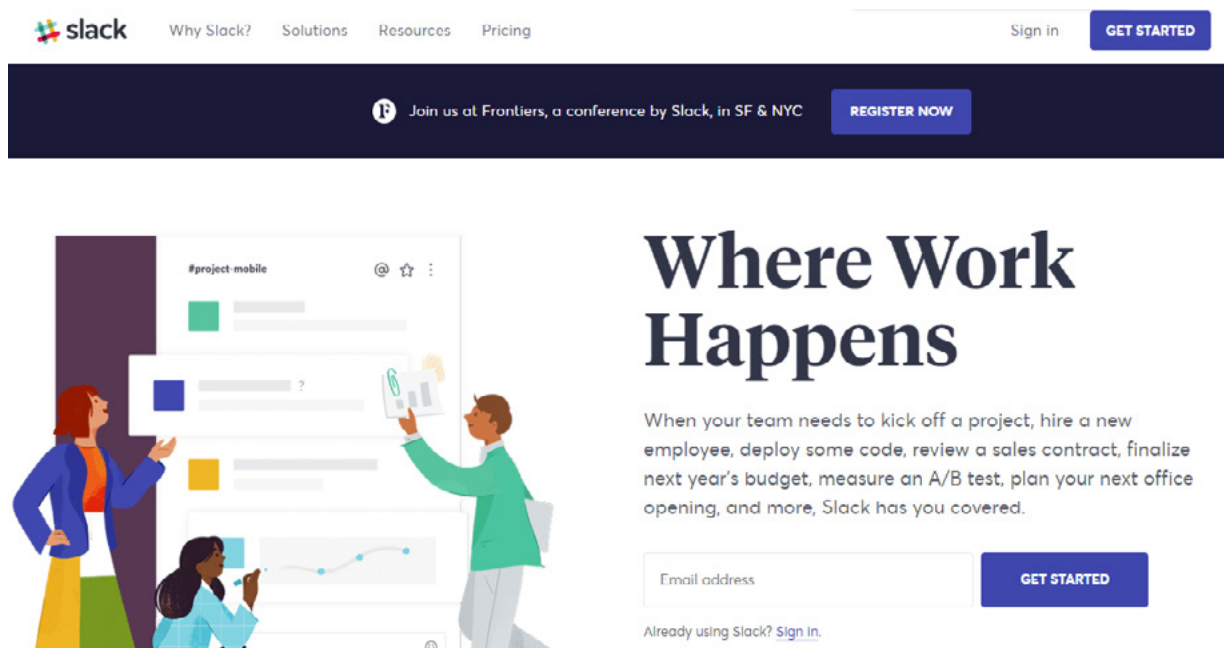
4. Be visual

Don't expect people to read a bunch of text on your websites. Chances are, visitors are bouncing pretty quickly, either they come to your page and get the app or they leave right away. You have little time to engage them with some visual stimulus. Again, you should look to direct them to 1-3 things that really stand out. If those three things spark interest, they will proceed to read more about your app.

5. Ensure multi-channel compatibility

Given the current age of web development, it's almost a given that you must have a responsive design that will work seamlessly across all devices and their various dimensions. Now, this may sound like a handful, however, you don't need to learn JavaScript or CSS to get there. Simply use a service like Squarespace or Wix and they will do most of the work for you. Not only does this alleviate added stress, it also allows you to spend more time on your app!

Here at AGN we love using Slack for talking to each other, and we wanted to show them as an example of a great domain.

## 2b. Choose a good bundle ID & developer account

Google is a search engine and play.google.com, where all the Android apps live, is part of it. All metadata are indexed and are part of the ranking algorithm.

One key factor in ranking is the bundle ID. A bundle ID has a format of com.example.myapp. As Google explains in its guide:

"Bundle ID uniquely identifies your app on the device and in Google Play Store. If you want to upload a new version of your app, the application ID (and the certificate you sign it with) must be the same as the original APK—if you change the application ID, Google Play Store treats the APK as a completely different app. So once you publish your app, you should never change the application ID."

We recommend using a user and search-friendly bundle ID and the name of your developer account to increase your chances of better long term ranking.

For example, for their Android app, Relax Melodies chose a bundle ID ipnossoft.rma.free. While this ID corresponds to their developer account, a more search friendly bundle ID would be **com. relaxmelodies.sleep.**
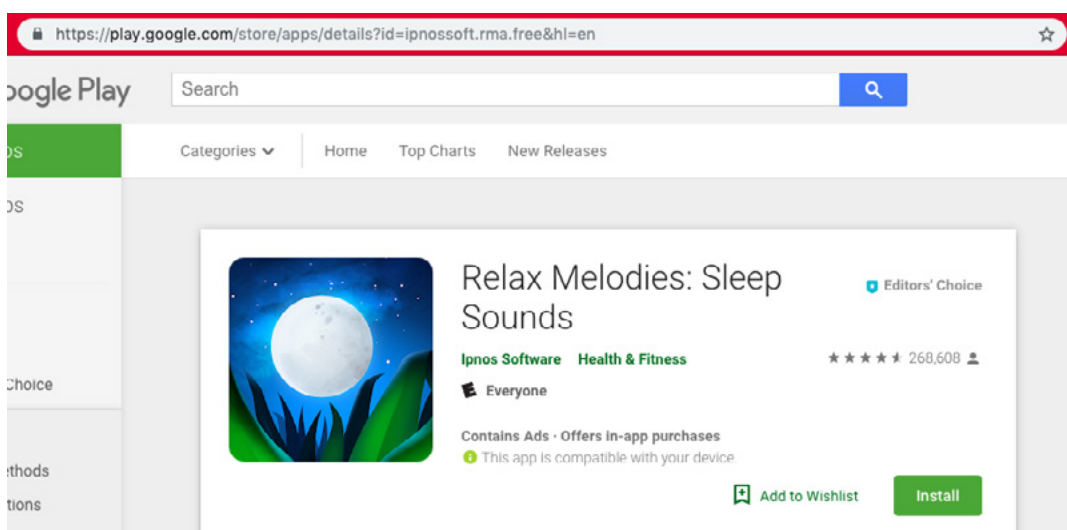
2c. How to do keyword research

Keyword research is a very important part of your marketing and may just be that thing that will get you to the top!

With the evolution of ASO, App Store and Google Play have introduced paid search spots, ads and keyword bidding. Moreover, most apps are found through app stores, and - apart from app visibility - the only other solution to win over users is through keywords

Let's get into it. The whole process of keyword research can be summarized in 4 steps. Here's a diagram from Phiture that illustrates the Keyword Optimization Cycle

We realize that this may be a handful to go through right away, so we will highlight our key takeaways for a simplified version.

Brainstorm

Start off by brainstorming. You know your app better than most, think of the words that relate to your app and what you would expect people to search for and find your app. If your app is all about fitness, you may include words like *workout, exercise, weight loss* and so on.

Know your competition

You can use auto-complete searches in the app store to see which keywords show up frequently. Fortunately, there are a lot of analytical tools out there. We like Apptweak, which allows you to track certain properties of your keywords like the volume of searches, difficulty and the chance your app will show up for that keyword. What's even better, you can track how well your competitors are doing with certain keywords, which keywords are branded and more.

Prioritize

Now that you have your favourite keywords and are aware of those of your competitors, it's time to make decisions and choose which keywords you are going to keep and which are not worth the precious keyword character limit in the Apple App Store. You also have to decide which keywords go where, it can be your title, subtitle or short/long description.

Repeat

Remember that this is an ongoing process that requires attention and revision. No matter how good your keywords are, due to the constant changes within the app stores and users' preferences, you may be outranked quickly if you leave it to chance.

Don't forget your creatives

Building Phase

3a. How to make your app icon stand out - and why you need to

Consider your icon to be your very first branding component - the visual representation of your app's core. With 1.8 million apps in the Apple Store and 2.1 million in Google Play, users have plenty of apps to choose from.

Your icon is the first impression they'll get of your app and what it's like, and the first thing they'll see before deciding to download - before even your name, description or screenshots. Having a "just ok" icon versus having a stand-out icon could mean the difference between getting a scrolling user to stop on your app - or having them whizz on by and missing out on an opportunity completely.

Now, let's talk app icon design and best practices...

Keep it clean

Remember that your app icon will be seen mostly on smartphones - which means they're pretty small! In order to connect instantly to a prospect, they must be able to see the imagery clearly. An icon that is complicated or tries to pack in too much won't catch the eye and will surely get skipped over. Clean and minimalist is the way to go. Not convinced? Take a look at these examples of paid apps that top the charts to see what we mean:

Facetune 4+
The Original Selfie Editor
Lightricks Ltd.
#1 in Photo & Video
★★★★★ 4.9, 94.9K Ratings
$3.99

Sky Guide 4+
View Stars Night or Day
Fifth Star Labs LLC
#1 in Reference
★★★★★ 4.9, 143.4K Ratings
$2.99 · Offers In-App Purchases

AutoSleep Tracker for Watch
Auto Track Sleep with Watch.
Tantsissa
#2 in Health & Fitness
★★★★★ 4.7, 18.3K Ratings
$2.99

Find the right balance between simple and catchy

The only way to grab people's attention and be memorable is to stand out from the crowd - in a good way. The design should be interesting while being relevant to the solution your app offers. Do your research. Are the competitors in your category mainly using blue in their icon design? Then try using green in yours. Are most of your competitors using a check mark? Then make sure you don't use a check mark!

Having a simple design doesn't mean it has to be boring. The examples above illustrate this point perfectly. The design is so well thought out and concise artistically, nothing needs to be explained. The AutoSleep Tracker icon is just a light circle against a dark background - doesn't get much simpler than that! But it catches your eye, doesn't it? Because of the hues chosen- the pale yellow of the circle that creates a "halo" effect around the dark background that progressively gets darker - and with its slightly off-center positioning, there's no question that it's the moon in the night sky. The fact that nighttime/sleep is the essence of the app is communicated immediately.

Match the design to the app style

While you want your app's icon design to be eye-catching, you also want to make sure that its design is smart. What the icon visually communicates should make sense and create a bridge to the app itself - which means staying consistent across all styling elements. Text, image style and color palette should create a steady experience across the board.

Mealime, a meal planning and recipes app shown below, is a good example of consistent design. Their icon is simple and clean with a bright lime-green and white color palette. When you look at the screenshots, you get the same experience. The same bright green is used in select text and buttons as shown in the screenshots - the app design is also clean and simple - making the icon an accurate representation of what the user will experience with the app itself.

Mealime logo

App screenshots
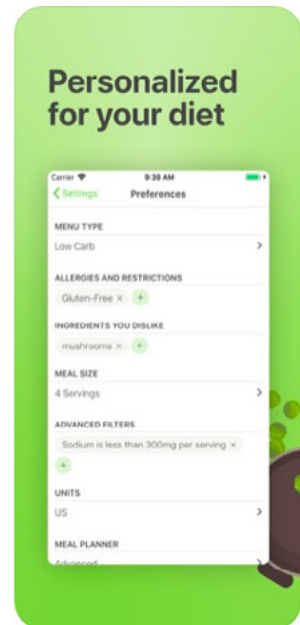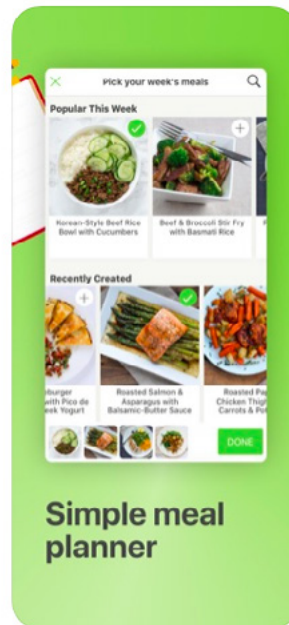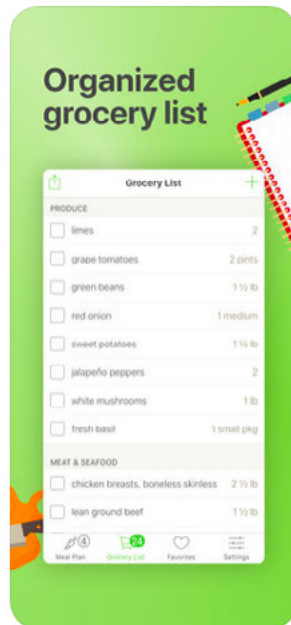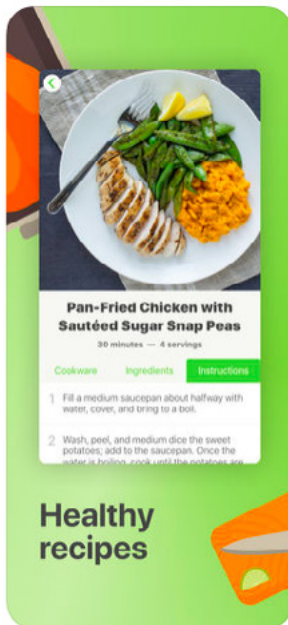
Ensure scalability

An important thing to remember is that your icon will appear in different sizes and at different resolutions. Make sure that the icon is equally effective in a variety of sizes - is anything lost if it's used smaller or bigger? Does it "read" the same way regardless of resolution and platform use?

Test the preview icon in all scenarios - from how it will look in the app stores, in search ads, in the settings panel, etc.

Test against a variety of backgrounds

Your app icon will be seen against different wallpaper background screens - which is a variable you cannot control. Using contrasting colors in the icon - light on dark or vice versa - is the most common and effective way to ensure that the icon doesn't get lost, even against the busiest of backgrounds. The best thing to do is perform your own tests to make sure that the design and colors are such that the icon will "pop" against any kind of background - dark or light, bright, patterned, etc.

Test your icon

You've tweaked, adjusted and fine-tuned your app icon. You think it's perfect. But how can you be sure it will yield the best results? The best answer: test it. Don't settle on your first draft. Have your hero design, but create multiple versions of it - adjust one or more of the colors, change the font style, rearrange the design or add a character. Run the various versions and see which one gets the highest conversion rate.

Take our journaling app client, HiMoment, as an example. They started off with a text version of their icon, but knowing that characters establish a quicker connection and perform better in the wellness category, we created an icon character to test. After testing the new character, HiMoment saw a 26.6% increase in install performance!

Adapt your icon for seasonal celebrations

You've probably noticed by now that Google makes some brilliant and creative tweaks to their logo throughout the course of the year - like replacing the two "o" with pumpkins during the Halloween season and adding holiday ornaments and lights during the holiday season. Not only does it keep the brand fresh and relevant, but it captures attention.

Try "seasonalizing" your app icon and see what impact it has. It can be something subtle, like adding a small Santa hat during the holidays, or changing your icon to rainbow colors for Pride month. There's a reason why giants like Google, Facebook and Twitter take this approach, so it's definitely worth a shot!

Example of Google Christmas logo variation

3b. 10 tips to create screenshots that boost your conversion

App screenshots play a critical role in the on-page App Store Optimization (ASO). Optiming screenshots in Google Play store and App Store can increase your conversion rates significantly which, in turn, impacts your organic growth.

Here are our top 10 tips for how to create screenshots for your app that will stand out and optimize conversion:

## 1. Consider the differences between the App Store and Google Play

Search: While searching in the App Store, on iOS 12, 3 screenshots are displayed on your screen, with the option of having the first screenshot be an auto-play video app preview. Google Play store does not have this function.

Impression: In App store you immediately see almost 2 screenshots, In Play store there is a Feature Graphic on the top which can be a video or an image and then you have to scroll to see 3 screenshots.

2. Demonstrate the key message in the first screenshot

People only stay on the app store page for 7 seconds before they decide whether they download the app or leave. Therefore, you have a very limited time to grab people's attention and persuade them to install your app. By clearly communicating your app's key message in the first screenshot, users are more likely to stop and take your app offering into consideration.

(Starbucks screenshots demonstrating its key messages)
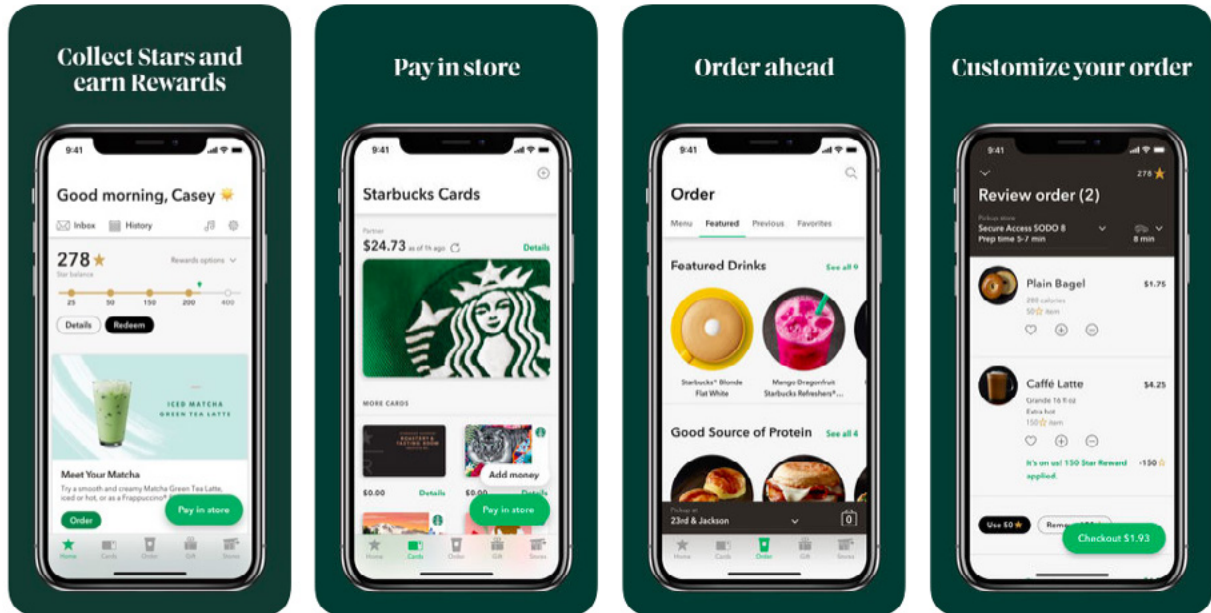
3. Keep the screenshots simple and readable

Keep in mind that the screenshots will be displayed on small displays of mobile devices. Test on multiple devices and keep the text big enough so it is easy to read even without clicking on it.

Use simple backgrounds and concise text - having too much information in the screenshots can be overwhelming for the visitors and decreases their willingness to install the app (i.e., lower conversion rates).

Screenshot of Tinder's app on Google Playstore, Large texts, simple words, and straight to the point.
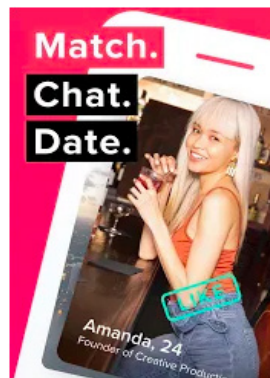
4. Connect the screenshots with a story

Instead of stand-alone screenshots that demonstrate the features of the app, you could try to connect those screenshots by creating a storyline between them.

Also, the first 1-2 screenshots should show the most important message about the app either in a video, or in a landscape or a split mode.

First 1-2 screenshot are "split" while demonstrating the main message (Shazam):
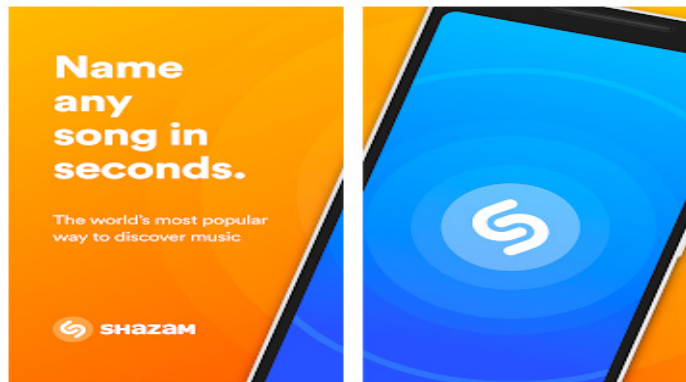
Foodora's first screenshot is different from the rest, but is connected by the background's design.
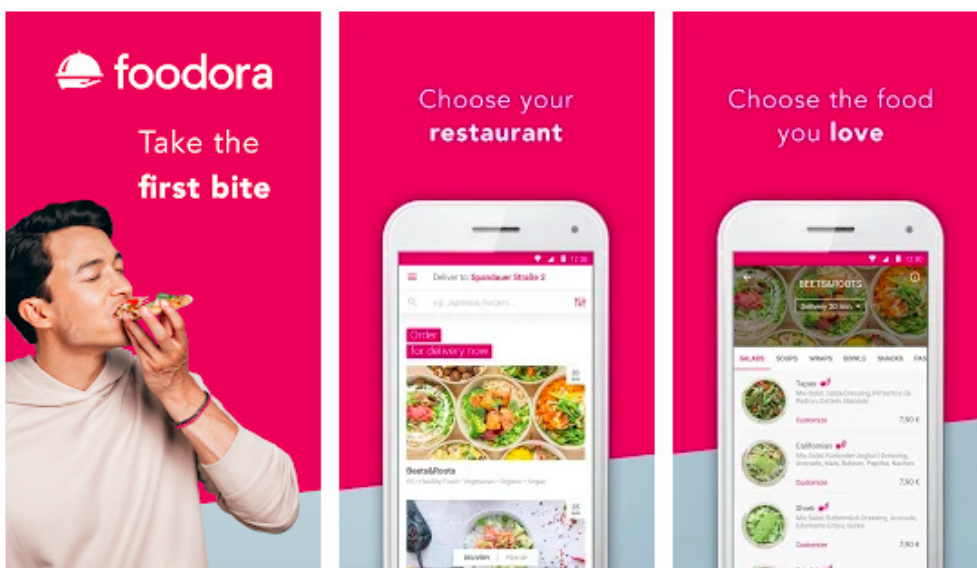
Linking the screenshots in the background can also increase people's curiosity to scroll to the following images, giving you more "space to sell your story."

While having "split" screenshots was very popular in these past years, they're becoming less popular because they require more advanced design skills.

5. Use high resolution images

If you can, invest into custom images which represent your app or game. If you do not have the resources for professional images, using shots of the app's UI is sufficient.

Do not use stock images. Using stock images can make the app look unprofessional and cheesy.

6. Edit the status bar

Whether in the iOS app store or Google Play store, make sure to edit the unnecessary icons from the screenshots. Focus on editing:

- The service provider
- Full wifi icon
- Full battery icon
- Bluetooth and other icons disabled
- Time - Apple recommends 9:41 or 12:01 (wonder why? - read here)

  Pro tip: If you have a Mac, you can use a QuickTime Player to capture the UI, the status bar will be edited automatically.
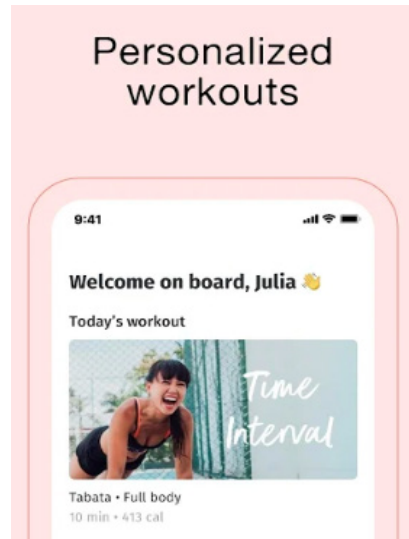
7. Focus on value, not features

Always convey the unique value proposition that your app offers to the users. How will the users feel when they use the app? Does the app have certain steps a user has to go through? Guide them through to show them the look and feel of the app even before downloading it.

While it can be a good idea to show the user experience, be careful because Apple has strict policies and can ban the screenshots if you use the UX images in an inappropriate way.

(Uber, Google Play Screenshots - experience based)
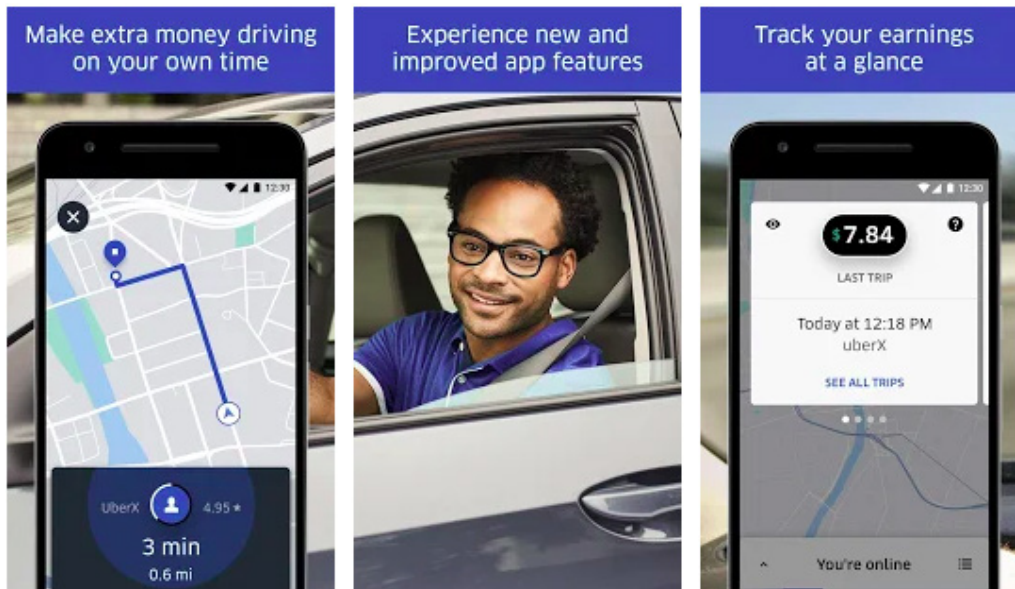
8. Localize your graphics

If your app or game is available in multiple languages and countries, localize the graphics of your screenshots to the local language. Localizing them can remove a language barrier and make it easier for users to understand the features of the app.

(Screenshots of Starbucks localizing their app in accordance to country - France, Canada, and Taiwan respectfully)
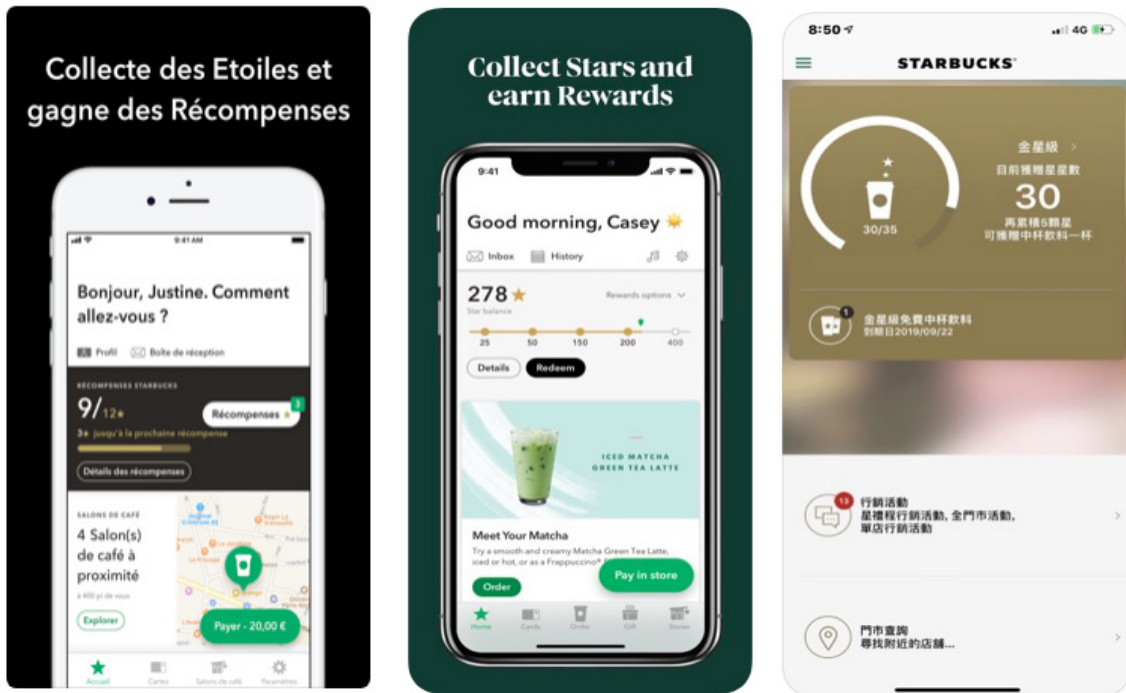
9. Use 5 screenshots for iOS and for Google Play

The app store pages are the place where you persuade the visitors to become users. Apple and Google give you limited space for your meta-data and screenshots for your ASO - maximize this space effectively and thoughtfully - you never know what can trigger the visitor's attention.

10. Awards, testimonials, exclusivity

Your screenshots can showcase selling points other than just your app's features and UI.

If your app has already been awarded, featured by Apple, Google, or a famous big publisher, do not hesitate to mention it in the screenshots. Doing this will increase the credibility of your app and people will be more likely to download it.

If you do not have this coverage but have another big achievement - e.g., 1M downloads or if you app has an "exclusivity" feeling - include those in the first screenshot.

Example from meditation app, 10% Happier:
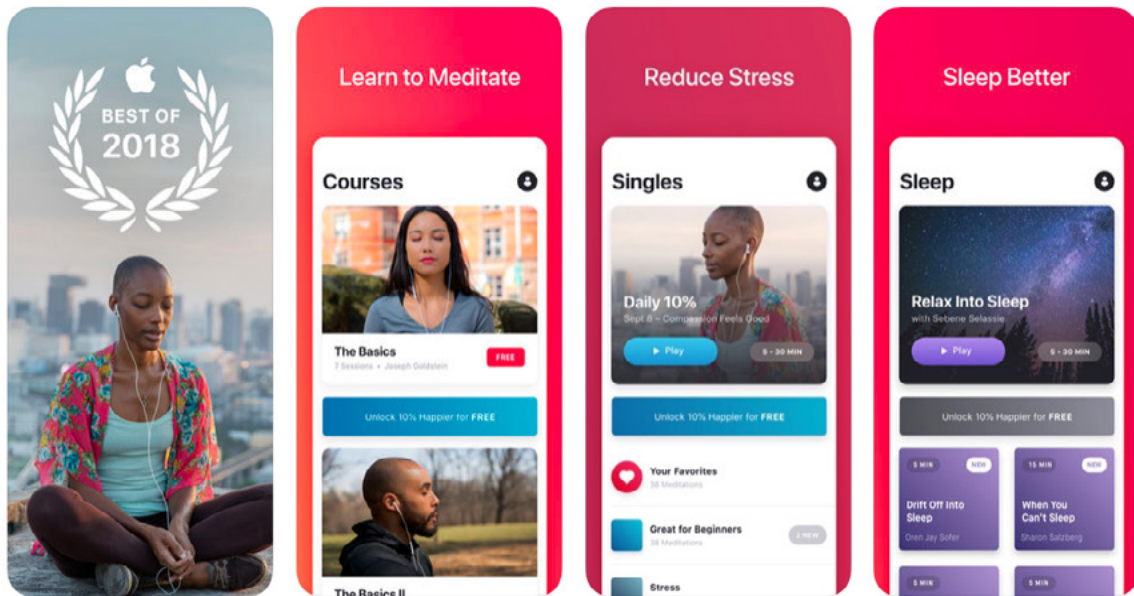
3c. 6 Tips on how to create an impactful app preview video

You may not need much convincing about the growth and importance of video in today's mobile world. A well-made video alone can increase conversion rate by up to 40%!

So, if you're not using a preview video as part of your ASO plan and want to, or if you are thinking about improving your current video, here are our top tips to consider as you embark on creating an impactful app preview video:

1. Prioritize and cocus on your strongest value propositions

We know you love your app, and you have 20 different things that you think people should know about it. But, the reality is, they don't need to know every detail of your app - nor is it a good strategy - to get them to want it. Trying to communicate too much in just a few seconds will not only confuse the viewer, but will likely turn them off to your product completely.

The key to increasing app installs of users who watch your preview video is to make your most convincing message clear and simple at the very beginning. Just like when selecting the order of your screenshots, choose the top 3 to 5 features you have to offer. Remember, visitors are watching your video to get an idea of the experience they'll have and what they'll be getting out of it if they choose to install your app. Take this opportunity to showcase the benefits to the user and not overwhelm them with feature overload.

2. Start your video with a bang

In other words, don't save the best for last. You only have 4 to 6.5 seconds of a visitor's attention, as this has been found to be the average video watch time among all app categories. If that isn't pressure enough, videos typically have less than 20% completion rate, so you actually should be communicating your main value points in the first 3 seconds. Also, remember that videos autoplay on the App Store, so you want to grab someone's interest quickly enough to get them to stop as they're scrolling through!

This is where having already prioritized your features will come in handy - start with your strongest ones right out the gate and add in descending order of importance. Even though the iOS App Store allows up to 30 seconds of video - and Google Play recommends between 30 seconds to 2 minutes - create the video with the "first 3 seconds" rule in mind. Keep it short and concise!

3. Choose your feature graphic for Google Play wisely

The feature graphic is your most important visual for Google Play- it's the static image that your video starts on and is the first impression a scrolling visitor will get of your app. And since 50% of installers make a decision based your app store's first impression, it's worth giving it special attention.

Google Play feature graphic (source: Google)
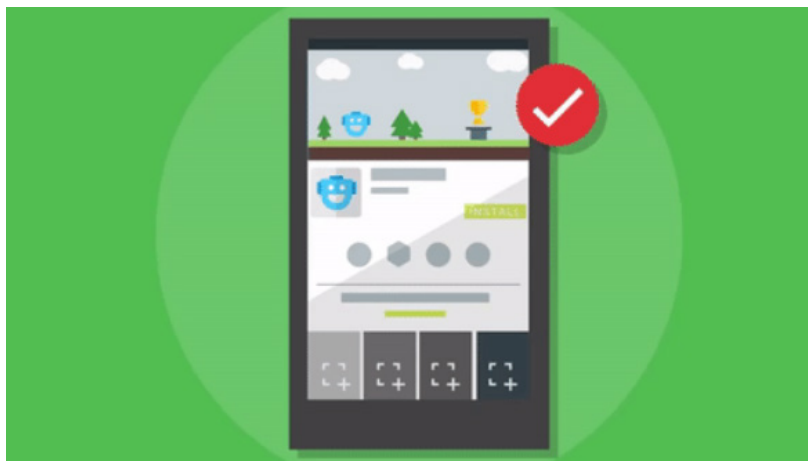
It's a different story for the Apple Store now, since Apple started with autoplay of the preview video on iOS - making the poster frame less of a vital issue. But for Google Play, the feature graphic can be leveraged as an impactful first screenshot for "decisive users" - users who are less likely to play the video.

For "exploring users," this image is the key to enticing them to watch your video and convert into a download! Since this image is extracted directly from the video assets, make sure the one selected isn't random that doesn't communicate anything of value.

4. Consider text and music

Evaluate your video in two different ways: one with the sound on and the other muted. Music is a great way to enhance the feel of your app - to set the mood for the user experience. A meditation app preview video can benefit from having relaxing, ambient background music. A game preview video that showcases the music style of the game instantly sets the tone for the nature of the game.

To stay budget friendly, there are plenty of royalty-free music options out there you can use. You can find online sources, or if you're working with an agency, they'll likely have access to their preferred resources. If you decide to add music, just be sure it's not so overpowering that it distracts from the visuals and the larger message.

Music is a great asset - when the user watches your video with the sound on. But consider that most people watch videos on their mobile device on mute - while waiting at the doctor's office or while eating lunch at work. This is when text overlays are particularly effective. Even with the sound on, text emphasizes the main point you want to user to take away from the visuals. While your potential customer is watching your app in action, text guides and draws attention to the highlights of the journey.

5. Be mindful of guidelines

Because Google Play and iOS have different video formats, Android's guidelines differ from those of Apple. In Google Play, preview videos require clicking on the "play" button which then directs you to YouTube for viewing.

Since the App Store autoplays videos, they have many specific App Preview guidelines and technical considerations to keep in mind before you produce your video. Knowing all the parameters and video specs ahead of time will save you time - and money - by not having to go back to edit more than you need to.

6. Call on a professional

Unless you're fortunate enough to be a jack-of-all-trades, that includes expertise in video creation, we recommend having an experienced app video professional do it for you. Remember that videos can greatly increase your CVR if they are well made. The video is a reflection of your brand, so if the video quality is poor or unprofessional, you instantly lose value and credibility with your potential users.

Plus, a professional will have access to a wealth of resources - like the proper recording, design and editing tools, music libraries, etc. - to make the video production process easier and more efficient.

Launch Phase

You've built your app; it meets the needs of your audience and has keywords, a description, title and subtitle which expertly represent the content of the app.

You also have an attention-grabbing icon, screenshots, and videos demonstrating the app's unique selling points. You've gone live (hooray!)

App store optimization that you've done with your marketing agency has helped you to rank among apps in the same category as your biggest competitors. You start getting some downloads (double hooray!)

The most important part before launching your app is to do proper testing and make sure you comply with Android and iOS guidelines for mobile apps.

A simple thing like metadata can cost you delays and missed opportunities. Pay close attention to the following as you're preparing to submit your app for approval:

• Make sure that your screenshots are in a correct device frame and only show real features of your app

• Avoid using competitor keywords in your metadata

• When launching an iOS app, you can include a preview video. If you choose to include it, make sure you do not include a self-promotional ad (a logo at the end of the shot is alright) and only show features which are part of your app. When showing paid features in your video, highlight that the feature is paid.

You have ticked all the checks above and successfully uploaded everything to the App Store and/or Google Play store. Now you have to wait for approximately 24 hours to get your app reviewed.

After being approved, your app is officially launched and ready to use. But how do you acquire those users? Also, how do you get them hooked so that they keep using your app and don't uninstall it?

Growth Phase

You got your first users, but you have more ambitious goals.

Luckily, you hired a marketing agency who advised you at the beginning that, if you want to acquire users faster, you need to save some money for marketing campaigns. Spending 100% of your resources on building the first version of the app will leave you with empty pockets for your user acquisition efforts.

These are the main paid channels you should consider when growing your user base:

• Google Ads: App Campaigns (AC)

• Apple Search Ads (ASA)

• Facebook Ads

If this sounds scary and overwhelming, don't worry! Your marketing agency or department will set up the selected account(s) for you and successfully run ROI positive campaigns on those channels. Paid channels will also help you with your organic growth and your ASO.

There are two main ways you can grow your app.

1. By acquiring new users through paid and organic channels

2. By monetizing existing users by improving product

User acquisition

To increase your user base, there are multiple paid channels you can use. Here is the overview of the main paid channels that can help you to skyrocket your app:

- Google Ads: App Campaigns (AC)
- Apple Search Ads (ASA)
- Social media advertising (Facebook, Snapchat, Linkedin, Pinterest)
- Spotify or podcast advertising
- Influencer marketing

The following are more traditional ways - but still very useful to use - in the mobile industry:

- Email marketing (old school but still cool)
- Web marketing (your app already has a website, so leverage it for your benefit)
- PR and content marketing (reach out to publishers who are willing to cover your story and improve your brand)

When you have a really good app product, you can also try to get your app featured by Apple or Google in their editorial section.

Another hack, in case you have a strong referral system in place, is getting your app viral. A simple funny video or being shared by celebrities can bring you a sudden influx of users.
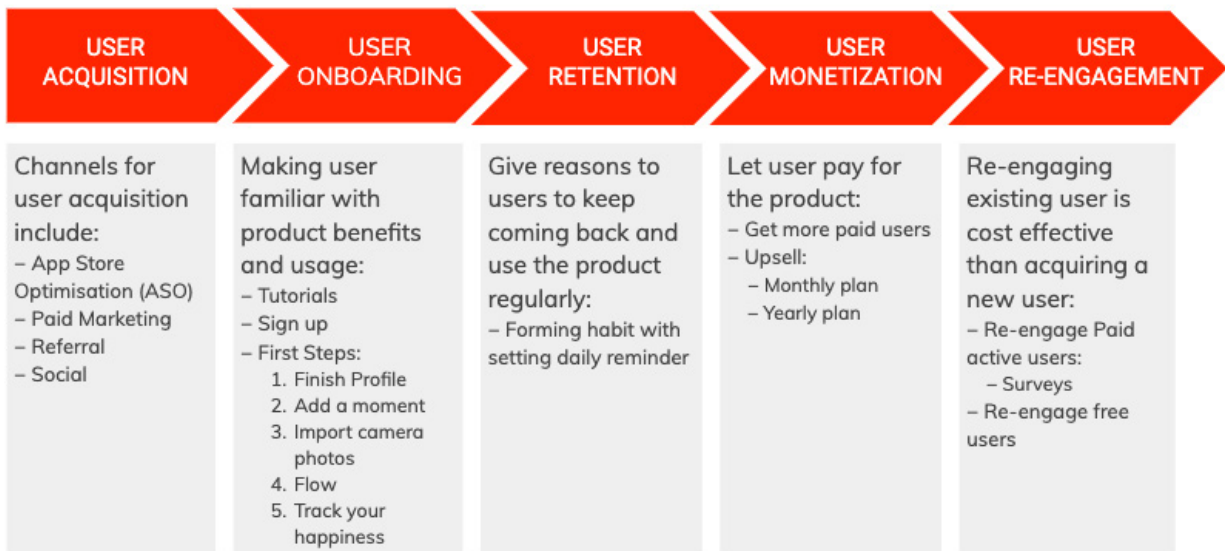
User retention & monetization

After you've acquired users and built a decent user base, it's time to focus on their activation, retention and monetization.

See an overview of a user journey in a habit-forming app.

Product audit includes AARRR analysis

User journey framework based on users lifecycle (overview)

USER ACQUISITION	USER ONBOARDING	USER RETENTION	USER MONETIZATION	USER RE-ENGAGEMENT

Channels for user acquisition include:
– App Store Optimisation (ASO)
– Paid Marketing
– Referral
– Social
	Making user familiar with product benefits and usage:
	– Tutorials
	– Sign up
	– First Steps:
	  1. Finish Profile
	  2. Add a moment
	  3. Import camera photos
	  4. Flow
	  5. Track your happiness
		Give reasons to users to keep coming back and use the product regularly:
		– Forming habit with setting daily reminder
			Let user pay for the product:
			– Get more paid users
			– Upsell:
			  – Monthly plan
			  – Yearly plan
				Re-engaging existing user is cost effective than acquiring a new user:
				– Re-engage Paid active users:
				  – Surveys
				– Re-engage free users

Every step of app growth - from acquiring users to monetizing them - requires a strong strategic plan, the collection and understanding of complex omnichannel data, and the ability to quickly adapt your product based on your market needs.

Because of its complexity, we will cover the growth tactic details in a separate book.

We hope you enjoyed reading our ebook "How to Launch Your App" and we look forward to your comments and/or questions.

Please send them to our email:
marketing@appgrowthnetwork.com

and we'll be happy to answer them!

Appendix

Beginner's guide to app marketing acronym

If you're newbie in the app business world, you may feel bombarded by acronyms - some so similar, that keeping track and making sense of them all can feel daunting. But don't worry; we've all been there. And remember - there was a time when LOL, BRB and LMK seemed like a foreign language, but now we're pretty much all fluent in "texting speak." The same is true here, and after enough exposure and education, it'll be second nature. Besides, everyone's a beginner at the beginning, right?

As you're getting your feet wet in this ever-changing world of apps, we've created this handy, quick-look guide to demystify app acronyms:

- **ASO (App Store Optimization)**
  - What it means: the process of improving an app's ranking and visibility in app store search results, i.e. App Store for iOS and Google Play for Android

- **ASA (Apple Search Ads)**
  - What it means: paid ads that appear in organic search in the app store and give your app visibility for non-ranked organic keywords

- **API (Application Program Interface)**
  - What it means: an interface between two systems that specifies how they will interact and communicate with each other; procedures that allow the creation of applications to access data from another system

- **ARPU (Average Revenue per User)**
  - What it means: the average revenue generated by each active person using your app. It's calculated by dividing the total revenue in a specific time period by the number of active users in that same time period.

- **CPA (Cost per Acquisition)**
  - What it means: how much you pay for every tap on the "Get" button

- **CPT (Cost per Tap)**
  - What it means: what you pay per tap on your app store ad

- CRO (Conversion Rate Optimization)

    - What it means: the process of increasing the likelihood, or percentage, of getting visitors to download an app

- CVR (Conversion Rate)

    - What it means: a metric that's calculated by dividing the total number of installs of an app by the total number of taps in the same time period

- KPI (Key Performance Indicators)

    - What it means: a performance metric that shows how effectively a business objective is being met

- KW (Keywords)

    - What it means: individual words or phrases that describe content; they're used as metadata

- IAP (In-app Purchase)

    - What it means: something that's bought within an app; the basis for the freemium model where app is downloadable for free and charging for add-ons like premium features

- ROAS (Return on Ad Spend)

    - What it means: metric used to measure the effectiveness of an advertising campaign. Calculated by dividing the gross revenue of a specific ad campaign by the cost of the ad campaign

- ROI (Return on Investment)

    - What it means: a percentage that's calculated by subtracting the cost of a campaign from the total gain received from that campaign, divided by the cost of the campaign

- SDK (Software Development Kit)

    - What it means: a collection of software or programming tools developers can use to create new applications

- TTR (Tap-through Rate)

    - What it means: metric that's calculated by dividing the number of taps on an app store ad by the number of impressions the ad received

- UAC (Universal App Campaign)

    - What it means: a platform that allows developers to promote apps (iOS and Android) across all of Google's platforms

- UX (User Experience)

    - What it means: design that covers all of a user's feelings and perceptions before, during and after interaction with a particular app, i.e. the feel of a product

- UI (User Interface)

    - What it means: design that encompasses the interaction between the app and the user, both in how it looks and how it works, i.e. the look and functionality of a product