

5 makings of a must-download app

Every brand wants an app but many leave consumers underwhelmed. How do you create something users are desperate to download?

Words: John Manning

1 Competition is fierce

The number of apps available from the Apple App Store is now more than 700,000, and is expected to surpass one million later this year. Google Play is fast catching up – boasting more than 600,000 apps and games developed for the Android operating system.

With many thousands of new apps made available each month, brands compete to win prominence for their release in an increasingly crowded marketplace. And it is a battle they must win.

Developing an app can be a costly process. “The one-off costs for a good app are in the tens of thousands,” says Momentum head of engagement intelligence Rachel Clarke. “Maintenance costs, bug fixes, management and customer service all add to this and need to be accounted for if the app is to have any life.”

If your shiny new app disappears into the ether immediately on release it is a lot of wasted resource that would have been better invested elsewhere.

One of the most important factors determining whether your app will fly or flop is the concept. What is its purpose? “It’s not enough to have a fun idea that goes with a campaign running for a few months; branded apps need to have value beyond a marketing expression,” says Clarke. “If I

take a look at my own phone, the branded apps I have are all practical. They allow me to check my BA flights, shop with Ocado, tell my Sky+ machine to record something or see what new dogs the Battersea Dogs Home has,” she says. “They all allow me to complete a function that would normally need me to be at home on a laptop.”

The first step in development is a comprehensive business plan. “You wouldn’t launch a business into a crowded marketplace without preparing a business plan – why should the launch of an app into a crowded app store be any different?” says Twentysix head of mobile Darren Reilly. “This should cover the market the app will address, associated risks and the features you plan to include.”

While a great concept is crucial, functionality is just as critical to success. If it’s not fit for purpose the app will fail no matter how groundbreaking the idea.

2 User experience essentials

Functionality and user experience must be prioritised over everything else – even branding, despite how hard that may be for marketers to swallow.

“Do not deviate from making something good by worrying about whether the logo is big enough or the brand message is getting across,” says Digit executive

creative director Henry Brook. “If your app is good you won’t need to tell anyone any that stuff, they’ll search for it and find it themselves – and most importantly will tell others about it.”

Chunk account director Ketty Lawrence says simplicity is central to great functionality. “Keep things simple and focus on making the key things brilliant. Simple and great is better than packed and average. If the product isn’t great to use no one is going to download or share it.”

Alchemy viral managing director Andreas Voniatis says that while there are many best practices that cover design and usability the overall message is not to skimp on the app development budget.

“App users are much less forgiving compared with website users and will attribute bad design or usability to the brand rather than the developer responsible for building the app,” he says.

“Test over and over and make sure everything is bullet proof, people won’t tolerate things not working,” says Brook. “One bad comment could ruin your short spell in the limelight.” Comments and ratings from other users can make or break your app.

3 Ratings and reviews

“Of course, an app with really poor reviews is going to turn off some potential



Most popular apps

Top 10 most downloaded free iPhone apps

1. Facebook
2. Pandora Radio
3. Words with Friends Free
4. Skype
5. The Weather Channel
6. Google Search
7. Google Earth
8. Angry Birds Free
9. Shazam
10. Netflix

Top 10 most downloaded paid for iPhone apps

1. Angry Birds
2. Fruit Ninja
3. Doodle Jump
4. Cut the Rope
5. Angry Birds Seasons
6. Words With Friends
7. Tiny Wings
8. Angry Birds Rio
9. Pocket God
10. Camera+

Source: Razominty.com

downloaders right away, so great five-star reviews are only a good thing," says Tecmark head of search Stacey Cavanagh.

Despite the value of positive reviews it is imperative that even in their darkest moments marketers are never tempted to pay for them. "It's an awful practice and the app stores are growing wise to it," says Cavanagh. "But do encourage your friends, staff and even family to get the ball rolling with honest feedback. If someone does leave a negative review try to address their complaint as quickly as possible."

A considered social media strategy will also help your app gain traction. "What those new to app development and marketing sometimes don't realise is that word of mouth marketing has more than one benefit," says Reilly. "Positive recommendations and reviews encourage more users to download your app, but note too that the more downloads you get the higher your app will rank in the app store. Make it into the top 20 and the visibility your app gets will suddenly increase by an extraordinary amount."

4 A helping hand

The chances of an app reaching the upper echelons of an app store on the basis of inherent brilliance and word of mouth alone are slim. A helping hand is needed. This is where app store optimisation comes in –

the art of getting mobile apps prominently listed in the relevant marketplaces. "It starts with your app's title and description," says Cavanagh. "Consider what people who need what your app does might search for and optimise your copy for it."

Google Play and the Apple App Store rank apps in a different way so the optimisation process may be different for each. "Both rely heavily on popularity, but other factors are also considered," says Accuracast director Farhad Divecha. "Google takes a few ideas from its organic search algorithm and is arguably the superior one."

Cavanagh recommends traditional search engine marketing as an underused means of promoting an app. "Google Adwords lets you advertise only to users of certain devices," she says. "With the 'Click to Download' extension, when a user clicks on your ad in the search results the relevant app store opens they are prompted to download it. With clever ad copy and targeting you can really make this work."

5 The right price

A decision that is likely to have an enormous influence on the number of downloads an app achieves is whether it is free or not. Gartner estimates that 89 per cent of total apps downloaded in 2012 were free – totaling 40.1bn, with the number of paid-for downloads a measly 5bn.

"Each pricing strategy has its own advantages, so consider carefully who your app is intended to appeal to and why," says Reilly. "Users are always drawn to download free apps, but in certain cases, when quality and authority are prized above price, a free app loaded with advertising can alienate potential users."

Lawrence says people more readily download free apps and that "freemium" models can help draw users in and generate revenue through in-app purchasing. "If you do take the straight pay-to-download route then understanding potential demand and how you differ from competitors is essential for setting price."

Lawrence also warns that download numbers aren't the only indication of whether your app strategy is a success. "You want active, engaged repeat users who will rate your app and share it. Retaining long-term users deserves as much attention as attracting first-timers." **tm**

The Marketer's new app Buzz is now available in the App Store – download it free to measure your social media impact: www.themarketer.co.uk/buzz

