

What are the ingredients for a successful app?

There's no magic formula for creating an app that will gain millions of users. But you can certainly improve your chances of success by following the right principles. Here we explain what those are, and share valuable advice from some of the world's top app developers.

Who's your audience?

Before building your app consider who your ideal user would be. Are you building a game for a certain demographic? Is it for people in a particular country or region, or do you want your app to have global appeal? Knowing your user before you build your app will help you make strategic decisions from the beginning. And it will make the design process easier because you'll be building the app to a narrower criteria.

We spoke to Polish app developer Szymon Klimaszewski whose Blood Pressure app has become one of the most downloaded health apps from the Google Play Store. He set out to build a blood pressure monitoring app that was quick and easy to use. He expected the app to be popular with older users and this influenced his approach to design.

"When I thought about building it I knew I wanted an app that can be used quickly, in five seconds. I considered who the users would be and this led me to create a simple design that doesn't have a lot of hidden features or buttons. For most people the app is very intuitive and quick to use." Before building your app consider who your ideal user would be. Are you building a game for a certain demographic? Is it for people in a particular country or region, or do you want your app to have global appeal? Knowing your user before you build your app will help you make strategic decisions from the beginning. And it will make the design process easier because you'll be building the app to a narrower criteria.

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Do you know the market trends?

Knowing what's popular in the app stores is an important part of coming up with a winning concept. Of course, the idea here isn't to mimic successful apps, but rather understand the overall direction of the market and consumers' tastes. You don't want to spend months building a gaming app with a style of play that users grew tired of a year ago. Free services such as App Annie provide insights into what's trending in the app stores, with info on many app subcategories, and also top download charts by country. You'll be able to tell the relative popularity of puzzle games vs. shoot 'em ups, for example. At the end of the day, it's easy to get seduced by your own ideas and build apps based on your likes and dislikes, but make sure it's grounded in what people want.

Tuyen Nguyen, Mobile Developer Advocate at Google, stresses the importance of knowing the market:



Developers should identify what makes their idea unique, and ask themselves what problem they're trying to solve. By focusing on these two things, they'll be able to concentrate on delivering a quality app that provides value to their users.

TUYEN NGUYEN

Mobile Developer Advocate, Google

Does your app offer something new?

With millions of apps available it's important to differentiate your app from the rest. That's something you'll think about a lot before building your app, and careful analysis of the market can help you find a niche.

Artavazd Mehrabyan is the founder of PicsArt, an app development company with a passion for photography. Their wildly successful PicsArt Photo Studio app is the most popular photo-editing app on Android with over a million ratings. He set out to build a feature-rich photo app unlike any other - and with that came risks. "Our team was having a discussion about the lack of a good photo-editing app on mobile. There was the perception of mobile as a limited platform with limited capabilities. At the time, photo apps were fairly simple and were being created to solve one or two tasks. But we believed they would become more powerful in a short amount of time, and we started development on our photo app in 2011. By combining multiple tools into one single photo studio it was risky, because we were developing a bigger application that takes a longer time to download, and we never knew if users would accept it or not. But it offered users something new, and eventually led to tens of millions of downloads." With millions of apps available it's important to differentiate your app from the rest. That's something you'll think about a lot before building your app, and careful analysis of the market can help you find a niche.

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Does your app have a great user experience?

Many of the successful app developers we've spoken to over the last year have an incredibly strong focus on creating the very best experience for their users.

Toni Fingerroos is the founder and CEO of Fingersoft, the company behind Hill Climb Racing, the globally popular racing game with more than 100 million downloads across all platforms. When he set out to create a racing game it was extremely important to him to build a brilliant user experience; he concentrated on refining the physics engine which controls how the vehicles move and respond.

“When we build apps our main focus is on gameplay. I realized something important as I went through the process of building Hill Climb Racing, I realized that everything should be kept simple. Everything started working much better from that point on. Keep it simple. To me, the fact that users like what you’ve made is key to the definition of a successful app.”

Aside from gameplay, making sure your app works flawlessly is important too. Untested and buggy apps just won’t cut it when users can uninstall apps and download an alternative in seconds. A well-honed user experience can be the difference between failure and success. AdMob research shows that 72% of US smartphone users believe an important characteristic of a good quality app is one which opens quickly, and 70% thought that ease of navigation was important to the overall app experience.[7] Many of the successful app developers we’ve spoken to over the last year have an incredibly strong focus on creating the very best experience for their users.

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