eBook

5 Mobile App Traps:
Where mobile app experience goes wrong and how to avoid it

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Mobile apps:
The future of digital experience?

The exploding mobile apps market is in a defining moment—and 2020 proved it out. Whether shopping, learning, entertaining, eating or working out, global consumers opted to engage more than ever with apps first. A whopping $143B was spent on apps last year, up 20% from 2019.[1] And there is no sign of slowing down.

Winning in the app market requires more than innovative thinking and digital prowess. It's also about making the right decisions in development and through the product lifecycle that can result in success—or risk losing your customers in droves. Common errors are avoidable if you know they're coming and what to do about it in advance.

We checked in with some mobile app leaders from across industries to get their take on real-world mobile app experience traps they've dealt with and conquered, so you can too.

Meet our experts

Sally Mok
General Manager,
E-commerce & Distribution
HK Express

Aditya Navin
Product Manager
RoosterMoney

Michelle Cutler
Lead Product Manager
Ordnance Survey

[1]https://www.moveoapps.com/blog/mobile-app-statistics/

Trap 1:
Mirroring your website

In the early days of apps, the dominant mindset was that mobile app experience should look, feel and behave just like the website However, with smarter technology and a more sophisticated understanding of app users, the answer turns out to be not so black and white.

While it's important to deliver a seamless brand user experience, trying to replicate your site within an app can lead to sub-par experience and performance for your customers.

On top of that, you need to take into account how your app fits into your overall business and CX strategy. How do you determine what to include in your app versus your website? Do certain features fit in better with one or the other?

Michelle Cutler, Lead Product Manager at Ordnance Survey, the national mapping agency for the UK, put it this way, "For us, it's about the user need that we're trying to meet in each space. Some of our apps don't have a supporting website because they just don't lend themselves to that. We focus myopically on what we're trying to achieve for the user."

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Aditya Navin, Product Manager at kids' allowance and chores app RoosterMoney, ties the answer back to the core objective of what they want the app to achieve. "What is our revenue model? How are we expecting parents and kids to engage with the app? Then we design experiences which are mobile-specific and see how that works through the tool."

Another consideration is how your app is built. "We considered whether we wanted to move completely to a progressive web app where we could actually put everything on the website within the app. But by doing that, we would lose some very good user experience that comes with a native app," says Sally Mok, GM of E-commerce and Distribution at HK Express, a Hong Kong-based low-fare airline.

The bottom line? Context is everything.

Success tips

- Determine what factors are most important to the business strategy and keep that front and center in your app development and experience execution.

- Consider your user needs first and their specific situation: are you focused on the task at hand while on the go or keeping the user in the app and heavily engaged?

- Be "ruthless" about whether the feature needs to be on the web and mobile app, or if it fits much better with one or the other.

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Trap 2:
Cramming too much into your app

Closely related to mirroring the desktop experience is stuffing in too much content, navigation and decision-making into your app. This can cause a trio of problems: clutter, confusion and user paralysis. In fact, less than 10% of users will stay on a mobile app if it doesn't meet their needs in the moment, for tasks like finding information or navigating to where they want to go quickly.[2]

Often customers are using apps while on the go and need to complete tasks (often one-handed) while grocery shopping, traveling or in the waiting room at the dentist's office. Straddling that balance of content, navigation and other functionality comes down to the tasks your customer wants to complete on the platform. Some apps are built for long periods of engagement, while with banking, travel or shopping apps, for example, users want to have a quick in-and-out experience.

A deep understanding of your customers' requirements is crucial. What do users expect to do in your app, and what are they trying to accomplish?

Says Mok, "The expectation of people using mobile apps to shop and work is that they look for really speedy experiences. So we look at two things. One is a loading speed, the actual speed the mobile app loaded, as well as what we call perceived speed, that is, how to make the experience feel fast." She also points to app enhancements that HK Express have made that have driven a big usage uplift: simplifying the booking journey, removing fields, and making it easier and faster for consumers to complete their purchase.

Success tips

- Optimize content for smaller mobile screens, from lean navigation to vetting each screen to assess its usefulness.

- Keep the user in mind and what their intentions are in the app.

- Don't lose sight of speed: loading speed versus perceived speed and how it can fee.

[2] https://think.storage.googleapis.com/images/micromoments-guide-to-winning-shift-to-mobile-download.pdf

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Trap 3:
Skimping on user testing

It's common knowledge that UX testing, beta testing and A/B testing are crucial elements to measure and test mobile products. At the same time, making assumptions about behaviors and actions can trip up product owners and result in flawed decision-making about your customers and market. Add to that, the act of spending a lot of time with customers can lend itself to assuming how they'll react, which can lead to judgment errors as well.

As Cutler put it, "You've designed fun experiences that you think will engage the users, but until it goes out to them, you have no idea how it will be received. Users will always find a way to surprise you in the way that they're using what you've created. You learn from mistakes and learn from successes and adapt to continue to improve and iterate and continuously optimizing experiences."

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Another area to be wary of is test conditions, because they don't always reflect real-world usage, as Navin observed, especially with children. "Kids will behave differently when they are user tested or when they're under stress or being watched. They also tend to give you answers which they think is the right answer." He now gives more weight to beta testing because people at home tend to use the app the way it was intended.

"Another tactic that we are using is to perform A/B testing," said Mok. "For anything we want to change on a mobile experience, we really want to learn about how changes drive behavior of the customers so that we can discover, adapt and learn from mistakes and successes to continue to improve and iterate."

Ultimately, for you mobile app to be successful you need to balance UX research at the front end with real-world usage data, A/B testing and ongoing mobile app experience analytics.

Success tips

- Bigger is not always better: Staged releases, a controlled roll-out (1,000 to 10,000 users) and observing their behavior can help you learn how to optimize the feature before launching it to your broader user base.

- Testing context is everything: There are common UX principles, but global markets, demographics and cultures have different expectations (speed, content, etc.)

- Customers change over time, so continue to capture and analyze real-world user behavior as a source of new insights and features.

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Trap 4:
Sacrificing performance

Speed is king—no ifs, ands or buts about it. Consumers demand instant gratification when using a mobile app. Common app problems that interfere with this important need include: taking too much memory, freezing, crashing, and too much time load.

App users have little tolerance for it—about 30% of users will abandon in-app purchasing if the performance is sluggish, and 20% will leave if there is a technical glitch. Maybe that's why most apps are uninstalled within the first 30 days.[3]

[3] Ultimate Guide to Optimizing Your Mobile App, Glassbox
[4] https://www.vervelogic.com/blog/how-to-reduce-android-app-size-during-development/

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Another factor impacting mobile app performance is the global market you are operating in, since infrastructure and network performance will be different. "China, as a market, is very challenging," Mok says. "'The Great Firewall' usually takes a lot of effort to customize the networking in order to tap into this market.[4] So this is an area that we have been working on for quite a while to make our customers in China mobile app users."

Lastly, your mobile development method can also have an impact on performance. "When it comes to experience and performance, native is vastly superior. You get much faster interactions and animations and transitions and all of these things," Cutler said, adding that leveraging the native app platforms and UX are powerful differentiators. But along with greater performance and better user experience comes cost, requiring specific languages, hiring developers for different OS systems, and other expenses. So like most mobile app decisions, it's a trade-off.
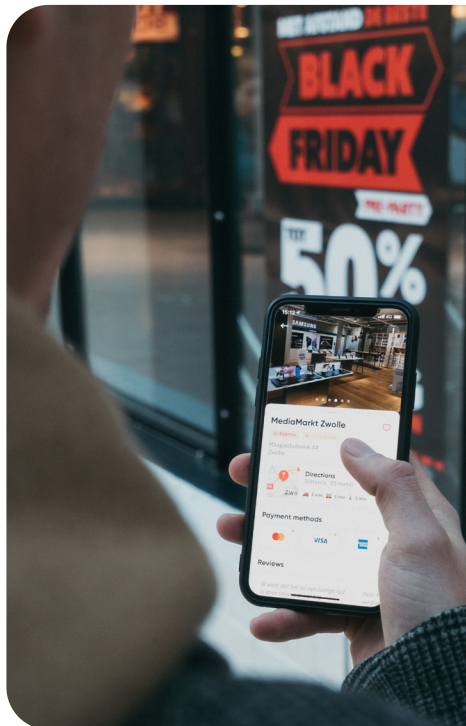
Success tips

- Search out the problems and resolve them: use crash analytics, network performance analytics and device monitoring statistics to see where the issues are and fix those first.

- Decrease the total app size as much as possible. When your app is over 150MB, you decrease the chance of installing it by 30%, and downloads drop 1% for every 6MB increase in the size. So be picky about which SDKs you use-choose one that can do double or triple duty (an analytics SDK should cover crash analytics plus quantitative and qualitative analytics).

- Embed performance optimization into your app design from day one, and you can decrease crashes and glitches, increase responsiveness and speed and avoid high uninstalls.

- Eliminate steps to complete an action, so interaction is speeded up, from one-click functionality to auto-populating forms with historical data.

3 Ultimate Guide to Optimizing Your Mobile App, Glassbox
4 https://www.vervelogic.com/blog/how-to-reduce-android-app-size-during-development/

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Trap 5:
Prioritizing downloads over user experience

The average person has 80 apps on their phone but only uses 30 per month and a mere nine apps per day—that means 62% of those apps don't get used regularly.[5] In other words, downloads are important—but they're not the only key metric.

As Navin points out, "It is important to know that you'll not have one single metric you're looking at through the entire lifecycle of the app. You should constantly change your focus, and that also allows you to be more agile and adaptable."

How do you determine which are the most important analytics to assess the success of a mobile app? It depends on the types of behaviors you're hoping to encourage.As data becomes more robust and your analytics matures, you can identify which behaviors, informed by your revenue model, you should watch to assess true customer satisfaction.

There is a diverse and rolling set of metrics throughout the app lifecycle after downloads, of course. It can be conversion rate from download to first use, moving users from a free option to subscription option; session length (especially if your revenue model is ad-based); retention, and more.

Metrics like struggle scores can play a big role in understanding your mobile app experience. By calculating the effects of technical and UX issues, struggle scores are a great way to measure your app's impact on the customer experience.

Success tips

- Be cautious with download metrics. Incentivizing downloads may lead to investing in low-quality leads and fluctuations in retention. Work with marketing to ensure ads in the right places to get the right quality users.

- Consistently monitor experience analytics, along with various metrics to ensure you're getting the complete picture at any one time and don't focus myopically on one.

- Don't give app reviews too much weight. Users rate your app once typically, so it's static, and it's unhappy people that generally end up reviewing and rating.

[5] https://buildfire.com/app-statistics/

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Free yourself from common mobile app traps

Avoiding mobile app experience mistakes is a delicate balance of understanding the pros and cons of different decision-making and taking the right path forward. In a market that is growing astronomically in revenue, falling into these experience traps can have a major negative impact on your app. Keeping these tips in mind will help you plan and execute mobile apps primed for success.

About Glassbox

Glassbox empowers organizations to create frictionless digital journeys for their customers. Our digital experience analytics platform works in real time across mobile apps and websites to accelerate loyalty and growth. Through AI-driven visualization and analytics tools, Glassbox helps teams to prioritize customer experience and digital product enhancements from a single collaborative system. Teams across the organization, from IT and product management to marketing and compliance, can understand user struggles, visualize the customer journey and optimize every step. Hundreds of enterprises across multiple industries choose Glassbox for easy, secure and private cloud-based deployments.

To learn more about how Glassbox can help you improve digital journeys, increase customer engagement and accelerate growth, view a product demo..

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