First Impressions Matter

We’ve all heard the saying, “You only have one chance to make a first impression.” The same applies to introducing your app to potential users.

The way you merchandise your app in the app store — the words, images and videos you choose — makes all the difference when it comes to convincing users to download your app.

As mentioned in the previous guide, when developing an ASO strategy, you can break down your efforts into two core focus areas: discoverability and conversion. We covered best practices for discoverability within our first guide, Getting Started with ASO, and next we will dive into conversion best practices.

ASO isn’t just about getting your keywords and name right; it’s about using both visual and written elements to tell a story about your app with the end goal of getting users to download it.

In this guide, we’ll look at the various assets you can use in your app store preview to increase conversion rates, including your:

- App Icons
- App Name and Description
- Screenshots and Video
Your App Icon: Keep it Simple

Despite containing only a few thousand pixels, your app icon wields immense influence over whether or not a user will download your app. An icon is the first visual element people see when they view an app store listing, so those few thousand pixels must collectively convey what your app is about in the simplest manner possible.

So what makes an ideal app icon? We turned to Michael Flarup of app icon design agency PixelResort, who’s well known for his app icon templates, for best practices.

Tips for Designing Optimal App Icon

Keep it Simple
Complex icons can be difficult to distinguish on smaller devices (or when nested in folders on a smartphone or tablet) and should be avoided.

Design for Scalability
One of the most important aspects of an icon is scalability. Because the icon will be shown in several places throughout the platform — and in several sizes — it’s important that it maintain its legibility and uniqueness. Overly complicated icons often fall victim to poor scalability.

Be Recognizable
Your icon will vie for attention among thousands of other icons with the same 1,024-pixel canvas. While scalability is a huge part of recognizability, so is novelty. Try out several variations on your design. Line them up in a grid and glance over them to see what design aspects catch your eye.

Check the Competition
Make sure you’re up to speed on what your direct competitors — plus top apps — are doing. Having an icon that’s too similar to another app can cost you valuable brand awareness.

Stand Out From the Crowd
This almost goes without saying, but try to create something unique. Mimicking a style or a trend is perfectly fine, but make it your own. Your app icon will constantly compete with other icons for the users’ attention, and standing out is a perfectly valid argument for a design.

Test, Test, Test
The quickest way to find the app icon that will perform best is through sequential A/B testing; however, note that the way you can execute on this will vary by app store. Android developers have it a bit easier, as Google Experiments allows them to easily set up tests and collect results, while iOS developers have to use a third-party option. Of course, sometimes you need to balance science and intuition in order to create a successful app icon.
We’ve found the best app icon tests come from trying out completely unique variants from the original. Once we identify a winning image, we then test minor modifications until we arrive at what we consider an optimized winner. We often backtest the new designs against the original control icon to validate the results.

Jeff Gurian
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Spotlight on a Great App Icon: WhatsApp Messenger

Social networking app WhatsApp Messenger offers an excellent example of an effective app icon that excels in nearly all areas: It’s simple, scalable and recognizable.

The simplistic design of WhatsApp Messenger allows it to look good at any size and on any device. And the fact that the icon reflects key elements of the platform makes it immediately and meaningfully recognizable.
Screenshots: Captivate Your Audience

While your app icon may pique attention, the screenshots drive home its core features and benefits. Each screenshot should highlight a specific benefit and use supplemental text, whenever possible, to explain key features to the user.

Get the Best Bang For Your Buck

Use All Available Space
You can include up to five screenshots in the iOS App Store and eight in the Google Play store to promote your app. Use them all to maximize visibility and highlight your app’s value.

Prioritize Key Messages
The first two screenshots are the most visible, and in the case of the iOS App Store, they even show up in search results. Make sure your most important selling points are featured in these screenshots.

Tell a Story
Screenshots are your opportunity to tell an engaging story to your target audience before they even interact with your app. Make sure your screenshots anticipate users’ needs and create a narrative that addresses them.
Spotlight on Screenshots: Sephora

In just five images, Sephora communicates key app features that extend a consumer’s shopping experience from in-store to their mobile device. In fact, Sephora recently updated its screenshots to more prominently highlight key app features in the header text and reordered screenshots to move the virtual try-on feature to one of the top two spots. This change showcases a priority shift in the company’s marketing strategy, highlighting new features that enable “try before you buy” options via virtual reality that extend users’ in-store experience to wherever they might be at any given moment.

Armed with competitive insights like this from App Annie, you can prioritize feature highlights within your own app and inform your product roadmap.
Video: Keep it Short & Sweet

Both Google Play and the iOS App Store permit the use of a short video to highlight the key features of an app. With short videos, you can give users a sneak peek into the in-app experience. However, given that videos are no small investment, you need to take a few things into consideration before committing.

We turned to Apptamin, an agency that specializes in app store videos and trailers, for pointers on how to create awesome, effective app marketing videos.

Pacing & Structure

- The first five seconds are critical. You want to compel the viewer to watch the next few seconds, then the next few, and so on.
- In a similar vein, be mindful of length. Currently 15–25 seconds is the industry standard. Use those seconds wisely.
- Keep the pace brisk, but not too fast. Keep the viewer interested without moving so fast they become confused.
- Focus on the best features first, and be selective about the ones you do include. It may not be feasible to cover all core features in your video.
- Tell viewers what to do next. Whenever possible include a direct call to action.

Production

- If you’re staying in-house, keep your video simple and keep in mind that lots of effects and transitions will look cheap.
- Music is an important element in setting the tone. Find something that evokes the right emotion; avoid overused music.
- Some users will watch with the sound off, use text and motion graphics to explain key points in parallel with the audio.

Fine Print

It should go without saying, but be sure not to violate copyrights with your images, music or words, and do follow all app store guidelines for previews.
1 SECOND EVERYDAY
A modern day video journal

Spotlight on Video: 1 Second Everyday, Video Diary

The preview video for 1 Second Everyday Video Diary, an app that stitches together 1-second videos into mobile video journals, walks prospective users through the purpose and experience of the app in 30 seconds.

The video showcases the app’s ability to easily capture real-life moments and create personalized videos by combining several video diary examples with highlights of the app’s features and functionality. 1 Second Everyday’s preview video succinctly communicates its value proposition.
Testing Your Creative Assets

Chances are your first asset designs won’t be the final ones. It’s crucial to continuously test new designs to identify the ones that attract high-quality users and convince them to download your app.

We asked StoreMaven, an A/B testing platform for marketing assets, to share tips and best practices for testing creative assets to improve ASO.

App Store Design: Providing Content Users Crave

Finding the right assets, driving the most relevant messages and matching user expectations are all crucial, but you can’t do any of these things right without testing the various app store elements.

Different Views for Different Stores

The first view of an app differs dramatically in Google Play and in the iOS App Store, which means that users respond very differently to the same assets in each store. Indeed, developers are often surprised to find that their best performing Google Play creatives perform poorly in the iOS App Store.

In Google Play, users get a full picture upon page load: a prominent featured graphic on the top of the page with a short description text on the bottom. According to StoreMaven, an app store testing service, this full view makes Google Play users 40% more likely to make a quick decision to download an app compared with iOS users.

Based on the app store you use, your testing focus may change — and your creative assets will likely change as well. Keep these key differences in mind when developing your app store assets.
Mastering Storytelling

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to optimizing your app store presence. You’ll have to test, track what’s working, make changes — and do it all again. It’s important to spend some time building your story to ensure that your brand and messaging is conveyed so users know what to expect after downloading your app. You’ll also need to be well-versed in the differences between app stores, particularly if you’re releasing your app in multiple stores at once. What works well in one may not in another.

Want to Learn More?

In the next guide, Launching Your First User Acquisition Campaign, we’ll look at ways to create a campaign designed to target and attract the highest quality users to your app.

ABOUT APP ANNIE

App Annie delivers the most trusted app data and insights for your business to succeed in the global app economy. Over 1 million registered members rely on App Annie to better understand the app market, their businesses and the opportunities around them. The company is headquartered in San Francisco with 15 global offices. App Annie has received $157 million in financing from investors such as e.ventures, Greenspring Associates, Grey croft Partners, IDG Capital Partners, Institutional Venture Partners and Sequoia Capital.

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