

David Appleyard



iPhone App Entrepreneur

*Interviews, Statistics,
Tips & Techniques*

app[⚡]storm



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FOREWORD

The iTunes® App StoreSM launched on July 10th, 2008 to much fanfare and drama. Opening up a marketplace for software developers to target the iPhone®, iPod touch® and iPad™, it has rocketed to success over the past two years. At the time of writing this, over three billion applications have been downloaded.

The potential for success has proven to be phenomenal. Developers have the ability to easily reach millions of users through a central marketplace, and many are leveraging that opportunity to make thousands of dollars every day.

Unfortunately, despite the occasional success story, the fact remains that becoming an overnight App Store phenomenon is difficult. Many developers struggle to achieve great success with their application, and it's a tough market to succeed in. If you're wanting to strike it big as an app entrepreneur, it isn't enough just to have a decent idea and some programming knowledge.

This book *won't* give you a killer idea, nor will it teach you the ins and outs of programming for the iPhone. What it *will* do is provide you with all the knowledge and technique you need to spot a great opportunity, get the most from the App Store, make smart decisions about development, craft a stunning interface, and promote your app successfully.

Drawing on survey responses from over 1,000 iPhone users, and in-depth insight from a handful of incredibly talented iPhone developers, this guide will equip you with everything you need to successfully become an iPhone app entrepreneur.

Good luck, and I hope you enjoy the journey!

David Appleyard
AppStorm Editor

1

MEET THE DEVELOPERS

Before we get started, I want to offer a special thank you to the developers, designers, and App Store entrepreneurs who helped to make this guide possible.

Throughout the book, you'll encounter interviews with sixteen people who have an intimate knowledge of developing for the iPhone. Their insight is remarkably helpful for starting out on the right track when developing your own application.

Over the next few pages I'd like to introduce you to a handful of the most talented and successful people working in the industry, who generously gave up their time and expertise to contribute to this book.

And the Developers are...



Graham Clarke – Glasshouse Apps

glasshouseapps.com

Glasshouse Apps started out with Barista and Cellar, two unique applications to help you make a great cup of coffee, and to manage your wine library. Graham has seen recent success with the release of The Early Edition for the iPad, a brilliantly unique RSS reader.



Michael Johnston & Fred Cheng – Simplenote

simplenoteapp.com

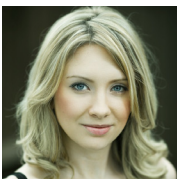
Simplenote is, as the name suggests, a wonderful way to take simple notes and keep them synchronized between multiple apps and services. By far and away the best note taking application for the iPhone.



Dave Verwer – Shiny Development

shinydevelopment.com

Dave has years of Mac development experience under his belt, and developed the popular iPhone game “Balloons”. He runs a number of different Mac user groups, and knows everything there is to know about programming and development!



Sarah Parmenter – You Know Who

youknowwhodesign.com

Sarah is the talented designer behind You Know Who, a web design and development studio based in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. An expert in iPhone UI design, she has worked on a number of beautiful iPhone applications.

**Marc Edwards – Bjango**

bjango.com

Bjango create wonderfully designed apps both for the Mac, iPad, and iPhone, including iStat Menus and the incredibly useful “Consume”.

Their unique illustration style and interface design sets them apart from many other developers, and they seem to have an endless stream of fantastic ideas.

**Joshua Tessier, Tariq Zaid & Adam McNamara – Select Start Studios**

selectstartstudios.com

Select Start Studios are the developers behind Headquarters, a popular Basecamp application for the iPhone. Another of their applications, AppNotify, provides an additional way to add push notification support to your iPhone.

**David Heinemeier Hansson & Jason Fried – 37signals**

37signals.com

Developers of a range of online business productivity software, 37signals have over three million users and a passion for keeping things simple. An expanding ecosystem of companion iPhone apps have sprung up over the past few years, and 37signals have recently taken the plunge into the App Store themselves.

**Devin Ross – Attic**

atticapp.com

Attic is a slick music controller for all those unplayed albums that are collecting dust sitting in your iTunes library. Devin has some interesting information to share about promoting your app, collaborating with other developers, and working with the App Store.



Sebastiaan de With
cocoaia.com

Sebastiaan runs Cocoaia, a company that creates novel, beautiful products and innovative projects. These include Icon Designer, an icon design service responsible for some of the best Mac app icons, and Icon Resource, a site for learning how to design icons yourself.



Garrett Murray
ego-app.com

Garrett Murray is a developer, filmmaker, podcaster, blogger, and general all-rounder. His creation for the iPhone, Ego, is any web designer's best friend, offering beautiful stats for a range of web services.



Dustin MacDonald
acrylicapps.com

Dustin is the developer behind the delightfully designed "Wallet" for Mac and iPhone. Wallet offers a central place to store your personal information, seamlessly sync it with your Mac, and automatically login to your favorite websites.



Gedeon Maheux – The Iconfactory
iconfactory.com

Gedeon works for The Iconfactory, the company behind apps such as Twitteriffic, Ramp Champ, and Frenzic. They're renowned for gorgeous interface design, stunning icons, and addictive user experience. If you've never tried any of their apps, you should.



Lee Mallabone – Broadersheet
iphone.broadersheet.com

Lee Mallabone is one of the developers behind Broadersheet, a personalised newspaper for your iPhone. It

provides news from around the world that you care about, from the sources that you trust, and Broadersheet learns what topics you're interested in.

**Sophia Teutschler – Sophiestication Software**

sophiestication.com

Sophiestication Software is a small software design and development company, which is run by Sophia Teutschler. Sophia loves to create simple, yet easy to use, human interfaces by striving to achieve the perfect balance between form and function.

**David Kaneda – Sencha**

sencha.com

David Kaneda has nine years of experience designing in a variety of fields, from architecture and fashion to education and software. Recently, David created jQTouch, a Javascript framework for iPhone development. He currently works as the creative director at Sencha.

**Dave Howell – Avatron**

avatron.com

Dave Howell is a six-year veteran Apple engineering manager, and the founder of Avatron – a leading developer of popular applications for the iPhone and iPod touch. Avatron's Air Sharing application, downloaded by over one million users in its first two weeks, raised the bar for iPhone application design and software quality.

2

PERFECTING A KILLER IDEA

So you want to launch your first application. Often the first hurdle met by developers is how to come up with a successful idea. With hundreds of thousands of applications available on the App Store, how do you come up with something original? Or how you can you execute an idea better than everyone else?

I've heard many people say that ideas are ten-a-penny, and that it's the execution and persistence that makes an application successful. I don't think this theory holds a great deal of weight. Most of the *really* successful applications available today either offer something completely unique, or solve an existing problem in a really fantastic manner.

A well thought through idea is everything. Solve someone's problem in a simple fashion, or entertain a user in a completely novel way, and you're on the road to success.

In this chapter, we'll explore the tips and techniques you can employ to craft the perfect iPhone app idea.

Brainstorming Techniques

I've often wondered how developers with a huge repertoire of applications constantly come up with new ideas. As it turns out, they have a few tricks up their sleeve.

Although you may find that an idea just “comes to you” at the time you least expect it, brainstorming and proactively considering new ideas can be a worthwhile task. Perhaps begin by listing the challenges, problems and annoyances you face on a daily basis, then consider how they could be solved with a suitable iPhone app.

Here are a few examples:

- I always struggle to calculate a suitable tip to leave at a restaurant. I wish there was an easier way to do this automatically.
- Price comparison websites are great, but they aren't much use when I'm out at the store. It would be great to have a way to check prices online using my iPhone.
- Logging into a number of different services to check all my website statistics takes ages. It would be good to have one central place where all this information is automatically downloaded.

These ideas are not just odd concepts chosen at random. Each is a real problem faced by many people, and various iPhone apps are now available to help solve them (Tipulator¹, RedLaser², and Ego³ respectively). This is the type of thought process many developers go through.

I asked Bjango: As a company with several different applications, how do you come up with new ideas?

¹ <http://www.sophiestication.com/tipulator/>.

² <http://redlaser.com/>.

³ <http://ego-app.com/>.

“Most of our ideas are born from necessity—the result of a lightbulb moment while trying to do something the hard way. It’s the simple notion that if there’s something we need ourselves, hopefully others will too.

We keep a long list of possible app ideas. It’s important to have a big list to work from, so you don’t end up working on a dud idea, as even a small app can take a month to develop. It’s critical the best ideas are the only apps you produce.”

Glasshouse Apps have three successful applications in the App Store, including Barista and Cellar for the iPhone, and The Early Edition for the iPad. The former offers advice on how to craft the perfect coffee, and the latter gives you a virtual “wine cellar” in the palm of your hand.

I asked the developer how they chose which of their ideas to take forward for development, and which to drop after the brainstorming stage:

“I try to start by thinking of ideas that inspire me personally. If I’m not inspired by an idea, and I’m only pursuing it because I think it might sell well, it’s going to be harder to stay motivated down the track.

Once I’ve established a few initial ideas that I think have merit, it’s time to do some research and make sure there’s a market for it. You might be passionate about the wing span of a mosquito, but if no one else is, then you’re fighting an uphill battle!

Even if you think you have a brilliant idea and a solid market, success certainly isn’t guaranteed. There are notable examples of developers ticking all the boxes and then falling dramatically short of their own expectations.”

It’s also important to remember that you don’t necessarily need to focus on solving a problem faced by every iPhone user. Concentrating all your energy on a specific niche and offering a valuable service for a select few people can be equally successful.

Don't assume that the first idea you take forward to development will be your main success as an App Store entrepreneur. It takes time to understand what works and what doesn't, so be prepared to experiment with a few different projects before you stumble upon one that really takes off.

Be the First

Being “first” gives you a huge advantage on the App Store – whether you're the first person to release a particular type of app, or the first to utilize a new platform or hardware feature.

The Early Edition was one of the first RSS readers available for the iPad, and early adopters were downloading it from the day the iPad App Store opened. I asked the developer how important it is to be the first to market with a particular type of app:

“ We saw it as quite significant to have The Early Edition ready for sale on the launch day of the iPad. Aside from the unprecedented opportunity of offering our own application on the very first day of an entirely new category of device (which was incredible), having The Early Edition there on Day One meant that we were on a level playing field right from the start. ”

This type of thinking is important, as the opportunity to have your application available to coincide with the launch of a new device is an incredibly rare one. With the iPhone and iPad now available, it could be a while before a completely new physical piece of hardware is released by Apple.

Launching on Day 1 gives your application a huge advantage, as there are far fewer competitors crowding your niche, and generally less “clutter” available for that particular device. Fortunately, you don't always need to wait for a completely new product to take advantage of this. Hardware and software upgrades often introduce new features that give developers an opportunity.

One such new feature in iPhone OS 3 was the ability to access the iPhone's iTunes library. Attic developer, Devin Ross, saw this as a great opportunity:

“ When iPhone OS 3.0 came out, I spent a lot of time looking into the new additions to the SDK. I investigated the new APIs like maps and mail composition. The music API was appealing because the data was already there. People already have music on their iPhones. With something like maps, you need your own map information.

I initially made a simple application to explore not only the music API, but the multi-touch gestures and the shake notifications. That application turned into something similar to the photo flicking apps on the App Store where you can throw around and rotate album covers. Writing that application helped me learn a lot in many different areas.

I then set my mind on creating something that could be a worthwhile application.

I watched the Apple developer videos on the ingredients of a good iPhone application. Apple had already made a great player for your entire collection, so I knew I had to make my app achieve a specific goal. After looking further into the API, I came up with the concept of Attic.

My product definition statement read as such: “an easy to use application to find albums in your library that aren’t played often”. For people like me that like to listen to entire albums at a time, this concept was exciting. ”

Apple regularly adds new hardware and software features, or opens up new functionality for developers to exploit. Documentation is always available well in advance of a new software update or device being released, so it's worth taking the time to see whether you can spot a new opportunity.

Here's an example of the new API features available in iOS 4 (formerly known as iPhone OS4):⁴

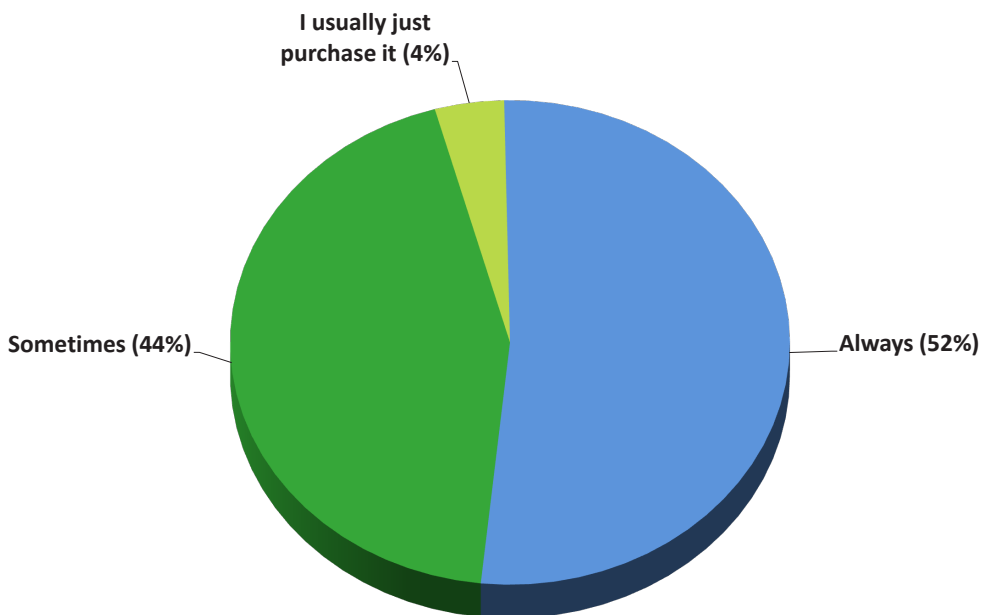
⁴ <http://developer.apple.com/technologies/iphone/whats-new.html>.

What's the most you have ever paid for an iPhone app?

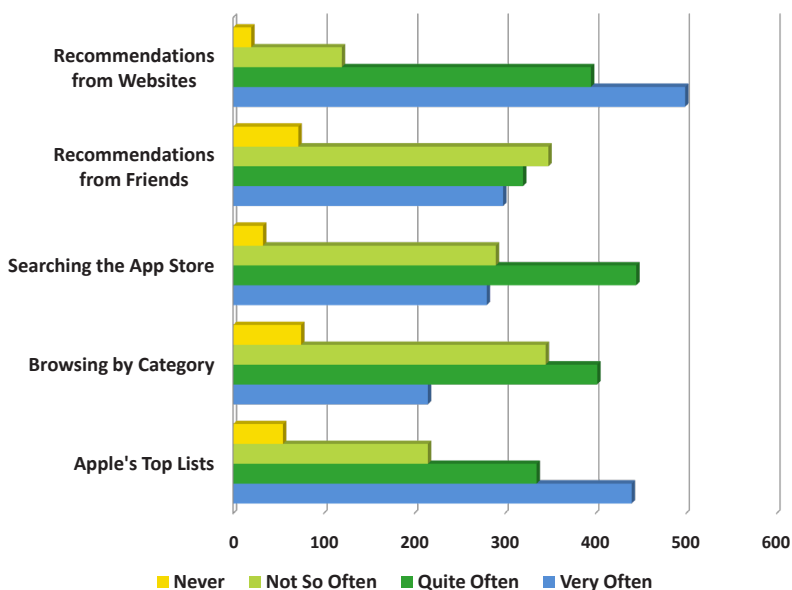
AVERAGE

\$14.58

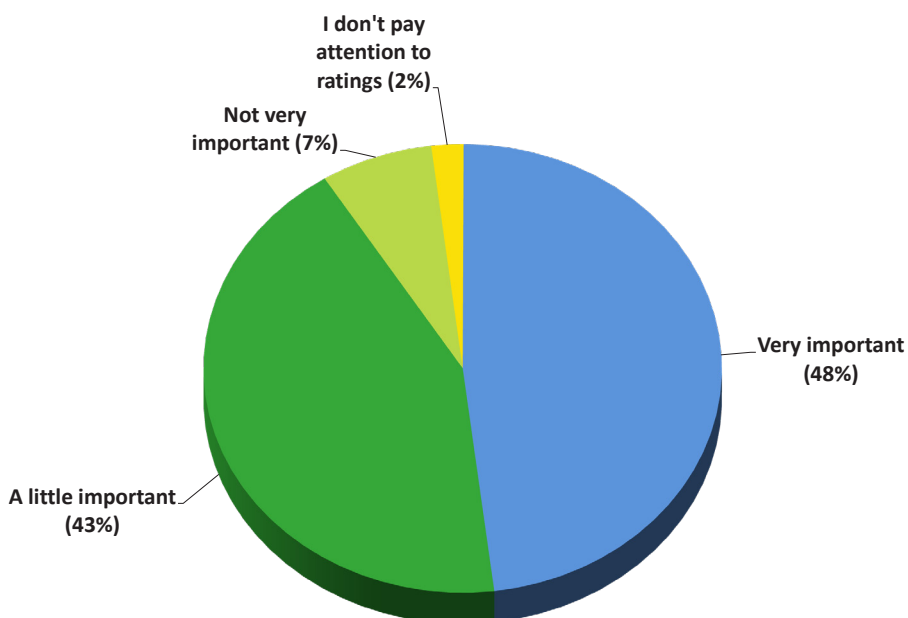
If one is available, do you download a free version of an app before purchasing it?



How often do you use the following to find a new iPhone app?



How important are ratings when deciding whether to buy an app?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



David Appleyard is part of the [Envato](#) team and manager of the [AppStorm](#) network, a series of sites relating to Mac, iPhone, and Web apps with over 60,000 daily readers. He's also the editor of [Phototuts+](#), and manages a few other popular blogs including Design Shack.

David lives in Manchester, UK, with his girlfriend Jen, loves playing with the latest gadgets from Cupertino, and is never without his trusty iPhone. He built his first website over ten years ago and is passionate about the Internet, blogging, and online business.

Check out David's personal website at <http://davidappleyard.net>, or follow him on Twitter: [@davidappleyard](#).



iPhone App Entrepreneur

In iPhone App Entrepreneur, AppStorm manager David Appleyard sheds light on what it takes to get you to iPhone app success!

This book provides you with the knowledge and the techniques you need to spot a great opportunity, get the most from the App Store, make smart decisions about development, craft a stunning interface, and promote your app successfully!

Drawing from the insights and experiences of 16 top-notch app developers, and survey responses from over 1000 iPhone users, David Appleyard equips you with everything you need to successfully become an iPhone app entrepreneur!