

COLUMNS

## Quantifying effective mobile user experiences

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By **Yoram Mizrachi**

With mobile technology becoming embedded in almost every aspect of our lives, the industry is beginning to mature. Over the past five or so years, the focus of developers and QA teams has evolved from building and launching applications to attracting a user base and to now retaining and engaging the most valuable users.

Significant investment has been made to capture loyal users. The average cost to land a user who has opened an app three or more times doubled to \$3 from March 2014 to March 2015, according to Fiksu.

While these costs are high, so is the payoff, and it is imperative that developers maintain flawless user experiences to engage and retain users.

Still, the process of capturing a loyal user has its pitfalls.

On review

First, a potential customer must discover a particular app among the millions and download it. When opened, it is crucial that the app work well or the brand will lose most of its audience.

However, mobile users do not have a lot of patience.

Only 16 percent of mobile users would try an app more than twice after failing the first and second time, according to a Forrester Research survey.

The Forrester study reports that half of users' state they would uninstall an app that they classify as poor and would be less willing to interact with the company's Web site or on social media.

In addition, there is always the chance that the user writes a bad review. Not only do bad reviews reduce search rankings, but also 60 percent of users think reviews are important in deciding whether or not to download an app.

While users are certainly finicky, they are becoming more focused, spending more time in fewer apps. This trend is driving developers to create stronger retention strategies such as rapid updates and refinements of apps and user interfaces to keep them fresh.

On average, Android apps are updated every 28 days and iOS apps every 59 days, according to research from the University of East Anglia and Center for Competition Policy.

As mobile captures a higher percentage of the global digital economy, consistent engagement with mobile users is now a requirement.

Some numbers to consider

some numbers to consider:

United States mobile commerce is currently 35 percent of ecommerce, according to Forrester, and is expected to reach 45 percent by 2018 this translates to \$138 billion

Global mobile payments are expected to grow 216 percent in 2016 to \$27.5 billion, according to eMarketer

In 2016, also according to eMarketer, half of all digital ad spending is expected to be on mobile devices, equating to more than \$100 billion

Loyal users not only consume advertising and make transactions, but also influence sales across channels.

Forrester estimates that mobile influenced \$1 trillion in 2015 spending at brick-and-mortar retailers

Engaging apps are also making a huge impact on the productivity of mobile workers. This trend will continue and IDC predicts that by 2020, 72.3 percent of the U.S. workforce will be mobile

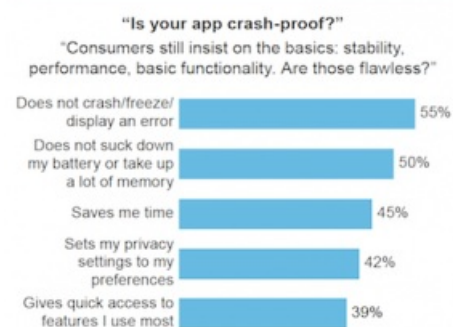
To capitalize on these growing opportunities, an app must deliver a high quality user experience.

But what exactly makes a mobile user interface good or great?

Good to great

Forrester recently conducted a survey of 1,000 mobile app users to better understand the characteristics of good and great mobile apps. The two most important features are user interfaces that do not freeze and do not suck battery life and memory.

**FIGURE 1**  
The Top Five Things Consumers See In A Great App



Base: 1,000 consumers in US, Canada, UK, India who use mobile devices  
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of IBM, September 2015

Top 5 things consumers see in a great app. Source: Forrester Consulting for IBM

The third most important factor is that the app must save the user time.

"Saving time," though slightly less definitive than preventing app freezes or draining battery life, requires fast load times and intuitively laid-out user interfaces.

The Forrester study also quantified the value of these features.

Good apps are defined as those that possess key app functions such as "does not freeze/crash," "does not suck battery and memory" and "saves user time," and great apps as ones that are flawless in their execution of these functions.

Survey respondents reported that great apps generated \$45.6 million in direct revenues and good apps generated \$9.5 million. Clearly, there is a monetary difference.

Adequate testing is the key to creating "good" apps, but to be "great" or flawless, developer and QA teams need to test across various user scenarios, including:

Ensuring that apps do not sap battery life or crash when users have their favorite apps open while talking on the phone and entering a tunnel

Making sure that the app will render correctly when it is downloaded to an outdated or unpopular smartphone

Most importantly, DevTest teams need to test on real devices and under conditions that mimic all the most common user scenarios

In short, user-condition testing is what will make an app great, and it does not stop with a successful app update.

DevTest teams also need to do user condition tests constantly.

Perfect teams also need to do user research *very* consistently.

As update cycles accelerate, the risk of pushing out bad code increases, negating all the hard work that has been done to perfect an app. Integrating testing early and throughout the entire development cycle reduces these risks.

AS MOBILE APP quality continues to improve, poor-performing apps will look even worse by comparison.

Apps cannot stay in the "poor" category long without hurting its brand and overall bottom line.

Adhering to tried-and-true UX design practices such as fast load times, personalized content and responsive Web design is important.

However, by understanding how the most valuable users engage with an app, and integrating all that user data into the development and testing of the next app release and the one after that will take an app from good to flawless, as well as bring revenues to the next level.

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